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ABSTRACT

Offering practical, classroom-based strategies teachers can use to promote literacy development, this book presents many examples of children engaging in discussion activities about narrative and informational text that emphasize collaborating, constructing meaning, and using these different types of texts to arrive at new understandings. Chapters in the book are: (1) "A New View of Discussion" (Janice F. Almasi); (2) "What Research Reveals about Discussion" (Linda B. Gambrell); (3) "Discussion in Multilingual, Multicultural Classrooms" (Alfredo Schifini); (4) "Storytime Plus Dialogue Equals Interactive Read Alouds" (Shelby J. Barrentine); (5) "'But Bonsai Trees Don't Grow in Baskets': Young Children's Talk during Authentic Inquiries" (David Wray and Maureen Lewis); (6) "Trusting Students' Questions about Literature: Stories across Contexts" (Michelle Commeyras and others); (7) "Idea Circles: Peer Collaborations for Conceptual Learning" (John T. Guthrie and Ann D. McCann); (8) "Promoting Inquiry-Oriented Discussions Using Multiple Texts" (Douglas K. Hartman and Jeanette Allison); (9) "Text Talk: Using Discussion to Promote Comprehension of Informational Texts" (Susan Anders Mazzoni and Linda B. Gambrell); (10) "Transforming Grand Conversations into Grand Creations: Using Different Types of Text to Influence Student Discussion" (Dorothy J. Leal); (11) "Pathways to Meaning Making: Fostering Intertextuality in the Classroom" (Trevor H. Cairney); (12) "Creating a Response-Centered Curriculum with Literature Discussion Groups" (Mary Ellen Vogt); (13) "Response-Centered Talk: Windows on Children's Thinking" (Lea M. McGee); (14) "Planning, Initiating, and Sustaining Literature Discussion Groups: The Teacher's Role" (B. Joyce Wiencek); (15) "Guiding Student-Led Discussion Groups" (Susan I. McMahon); (16) "Discussion: Assessing What Was Said and What Was Done" (Jane Brady Matanzo); (17) "Story Retelling: A Discussion Strategy to Develop and Assess Comprehension" (Lesley Mandel Morrow); and (18) "Discussions That Focus on Strategies and Self-Assessment" (Barbara J. Walker). Each chapter contains references. A subject index and author index are included. (RS)

ED 397 387

LIVELY DISCUSSIONS!

FOSTERING ENGAGED READING

Linda B. Gambrell
Janice F. Almasi
Editors

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LIVELY DISCUSSIONS!

FOSTERING ENGAGED READING

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John T. Guthrie is professor of human development at the University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland, USA, and codirector of the National Reading Research Center (NRRC). The NRRC is a U.S. federally funded consortium of the University of Maryland and the University of Georgia. The Center conducts studies of reading, writing, science and history learning, assessment, and professional development. Prior to this position, Guthrie headed the University of Maryland's Center for Educational Research and Development. Guthrie was director of research for the International Reading Association from 1974 to 1984. He received his Ph.D. in educational psychology from the University of Illinois. He has published more than 100 articles and edited professional books. In 1992 the National Reading Conference honored him with the Oscar Causey Award for Outstanding Contributions to Reading Research. He is a fellow in the American Psychological Association, American Psychological Society, the National Council of Research in English, and was elected to the Reading Hall of Fame in 1994. His interests are literacy development and environments for learning.

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Dorothy J. Leal has taught children from kindergarten through sixth grade for over 15 years, both in the United States and abroad. She is presently an assistant professor of graduate and undergraduate courses in reading, language arts, children's literature, process writing, and gifted education at Ohio University, Athens, Ohio, USA. She is coauthor with Turnbull, Turnbull, and Shank of the 1995 textbook *Exceptional Lives: Special Education in Today's Schools* (Prentice Hall).

Maureen Lewis was a research fellow on the Exeter Extending Literacy (EXEL) Project at the University of Exeter School of Education in Exeter, England, and is now a lecturer in education at the University of Plymouth, Plymouth, England. She has published widely in a variety of professional and research journals, particularly on the topic of children reading and writing nonfiction texts effectively.

Jane Brady Matanzo is a professor at Florida Atlantic University, Boca Raton and Port St. Lucie, Florida, USA, where she teaches reading, language arts, and children's literature courses. She received her doctorate from the University of Maryland and other degrees from Ohio State University and Ball State University. Her past work has included school administrative and teaching posts, director of graduate reading, and director of teacher education. Her research interests include multicultural education, teachers as researchers, and integration of the language arts. She has coauthored two books: *Raising Readers, Sharing Literature with Young Children* (Walker) and *Programmed Reading Diagnosis for Teachers with Prescriptive References* (Charles Merrill).

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Barbara J. Walker was elected to the Board of Directors of the International Reading Association for 1994 to 1997. She is professor and chair of the Department of Special Education and Reading at Montana State University, Billings, Montana, USA. Walker teaches courses in reading difficulties and works in the reading clinic at her university. Her publications include *Diagnostic Teaching of Reading: Techniques for Instruction and Assessment* (Merrill/Prentice Hall) and *Supporting Struggling Readers* (Pippin). She was a distinguished finalist for the International Reading Association's 1991 Albert J. Harris Award for research in reading disabilities. She is a past local and state president of Montana reading councils as well as a frequent presenter at state, regional, and national literacy conferences.

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Kimberly Wuenker graduated from the University of Georgia with a bachelor's degree in elementary education. She was a campus leader throughout her four years at the university and was a founding member and two-year president of the University of Georgia Chapter of Reading is Fundamental (RIF-UGA). Winner of numerous awards for leadership at the university, she was also a member of Kappa Delta Epsilon and Omicron Delta Kappa. She is currently pursuing her master's degree in education of the gifted at University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia, USA.

PREFACE

A major goal of this book is to emphasize that it is through the personal *interpretation* of both narrative and informational text that learners come to better understand themselves, others, and the world in which we live, and it is through the *comprehension* of both narrative and informational text that learners build a knowledge base about our world. The contributors to this volume, many of whom are affiliated with the National Reading Research Center, have been conducting classroom-based research and program innovations that focus on helping students develop discussion skills that permit them to explore the world of literature and literacy within an environment that is supportive and tolerant. Thus, the following chapters will provide practical, classroom-based strategies and techniques for using discussion in primary and elementary classrooms to promote interpretation and comprehension of both narrative and informational text.

The volume is organized into four parts: Creating Classroom Cultures That Foster Discussion, Discussion in Action, Creating the Climate: The Role of the Teacher, and Perspectives on Assessing Discussion.

PART I: CREATING CLASSROOM CULTURES THAT FOSTER DISCUSSION

In this introductory section the authors explore the core elements to consider when preparing an elementary classroom for discussion. Janice Almasi's chapter provides definitions of recitations and compares her definitions with the new view of discussion that is the foundational basis of the entire volume. Her chapter also provides authentic examples that illustrate the cognitive, social, and affective benefits of discussions. In Chapter 2, Linda Gambrell provides an overview of the rationale for the resurgence of interest in the role of discussion in elementary classrooms and summarizes what research reveals about discussions.

The ability to take into account the specific cultural needs of diverse learners is central to the creation of a classroom that fosters discussion. In Chapter 3, Alfredo Shifini provides insightful commentary specifically related to multicultural and multilingual considerations for discussions. Additionally, throughout the text authors have woven multicultural issues and issues related to diverse learners (such as students receiving special education services, students acquiring English, and students with diverse language development) throughout their suggestions and examples.

PART II: DISCUSSION IN ACTION

The second section provides readers with an unprecedented look at how discussion might be altered for emergent readers as well as for upper level elementary students. Shelby Barrentine's chapter begins this section with an exciting look at how teachers can use interactive read-alouds to engage young children in discussions before, during, and after the read-aloud event. David Wray and Maureen Lewis then share their ideas from the EXEL project that they have established in the United Kingdom. Their chapter makes the case that children's talk is more likely to be purposeful and to extend and deepen their learning if it arises from their engagement in authentic inquiry-based activities. As an illustration of this, one case study is presented in which six-year-olds become involved in researching suitable plants for their school garden. In Chapter 6, Michelle Commeyras, Kelly Sherrill, and Kimberly Wuenker explore the value of student-posed questions in their work with second graders. Using their own authentic teaching experiences, the authors explore their successes and failures as they attempt to study the questions their students ask and their discussion of these questions.

The section then gives consideration to discussions that are based on informational texts and content learning. John Guthrie and Ann McCann describe "idea circles," which are discussions or concepts fueled by multiple text sources. These discussions of informational trade books occur within the context of an integrated science/language arts curriculum. The authors describe the benefits of idea circles and how educators can create them within their own classrooms. In Chapter 8, Douglas Hartman and Jeanette Allison present a compelling case for making inquiry-oriented discussions a more integral part of classroom practice. Suggestions are provided for getting started with inquiry-oriented discussions in which students use multiple texts to make connections and to communicate information to different audiences for different purposes. Susan Anders Mazzoni and Linda Gambrell then provide powerful descriptions of a number of nonquestioning ways to promote discussion of informational texts, ways to integrate text into discussions, and strategies for stimulating discussion of informational texts. Dorothy Leal then concludes this section by explaining how specific types of texts (such as narrative, informational, and informational storybooks) can influence achievement and learning. This is followed by a discussion of teaching tools that are an integral part of grand conversations related to different types of text.

PART III: CREATING THE CLIMATE: THE ROLE OF THE TEACHER

This section provides practical and informative teaching tips for how to design, initiate, implement, and sustain discussions in a variety of classroom settings. In Chapter 11, Trevor Cairney begins with an overview of the value of student talk in classrooms. He also explains the concepts of scaffolding and guided participation as they pertain to the teacher's role in student learning during discussions.

MaryEllen Vogt then presents a rationale for moving away from teacher-centered talk to student response-centered discussions. Specific suggestions for organizing and managing discussion groups are included as well as recommendations for discussion questions and activities that support a response-centered curriculum. Lea McGee's chapter then provides a view of response-centered talk among emergent readers. She describes the nature of interpretation and how young readers' discussions reflect their ability to move beyond the literal level. Joyce Wiencek provides teachers with a model for planning, initiating, implementing, and sustaining a form of literature discussion group known as conversational discussion groups in elementary classrooms. Conversational discussion groups provide teachers with a means of scaffolding students' interactive and interpretive growth. Susan McMahon's chapter on guiding student-led discussion groups concludes the section and describes how students can benefit from leading their own discussions with teacher support. The chapter begins with a description of practices that can impede students' interactions and limit higher level thinking. The chapter then addresses the role of the teacher in guiding student-led discussion groups and how the teacher can provide instructional support for students to conduct their own discussions.

PART IV: PERSPECTIVES ON ASSESSING DISCUSSION

Assessing students' ability to interact with one another and interpret text has often eluded teachers as they explore and try to implement discussions in their classrooms. In Chapter 16, Jane Matanzo presents a variety of strategies that encourage both students and teachers to engage in reflection and assessment. Specific assessment strategies and techniques include videotape portfolios, specification sheets, discussion circles, and pre- and post-discussion debriefings. Lesley Mandel Morrow then examines the use of story retelling as an instructional strategy for engaging young readers in "talking about" what they have listened to or read. Procedures for using story retelling to assess children's interpretation and comprehension are also presented. Barbara Walker concludes this section by presenting a compelling framework for designing classroom discussions that are conversational and instructional in nature. She offers advice for developing and assessing students' strategic thinking behaviors and explains the necessity for developing students' abilities to assess their own literacy.

Linda B. Gambrell and Janice F. Almasi
Coeditors

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AUTHOR NOTE

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FOREWORD

Children's voices abound in *Lively Discussions! Fostering Engaged Reading*, and it is their voices, woven through the many types of discussions described in this book, that make it unique. It is a book that captures the meanings that children socially construct as they respond to all kinds of texts and to one another. It also captures in rich detail what classroom teachers, teacher educators, and researchers make of children's socially constructed meanings. Indeed, it is this interplay between children's and adults' voices that I believe supports the book's title so completely. Lively it is, but more importantly, this edited volume moves the literacy field forward in at least three significant ways.

First, the contributing authors write in a manner that clearly suggests they are aware of the importance of context to the discussion process. Taken literally, context means that which is braided together, and nowhere is this more apparent than in the authors' re-creations of classroom events where student talk about texts varies with the event. In this way, the role of context in classroom talk is highlighted—something rarely done in the past.

Second, the authors of the 18 chapters in this book are accomplished boundary crossers. They write about connections to one another's chapters, link their work in classrooms to established theories of learning and motivation, and explore new ground in their search for ways to foster discussion in multilingual classrooms.

Finally, this edited volume breaks with the tradition of allowing teacher-directed questioning to pass for discussion. The authors are unwavering in their efforts to portray teachers as supportive and guiding coparticipants in classroom talk about texts. They are equally steadfast in their portrayal of students as ready and willing to assume more responsibility for such talk. In many ways I find *Lively Discussions! Fostering Engaged Reading* to be a pioneering work—a necessary first step in opening more and more educators' minds to the possibilities of a critical literacy.

Donna E. Alvermann
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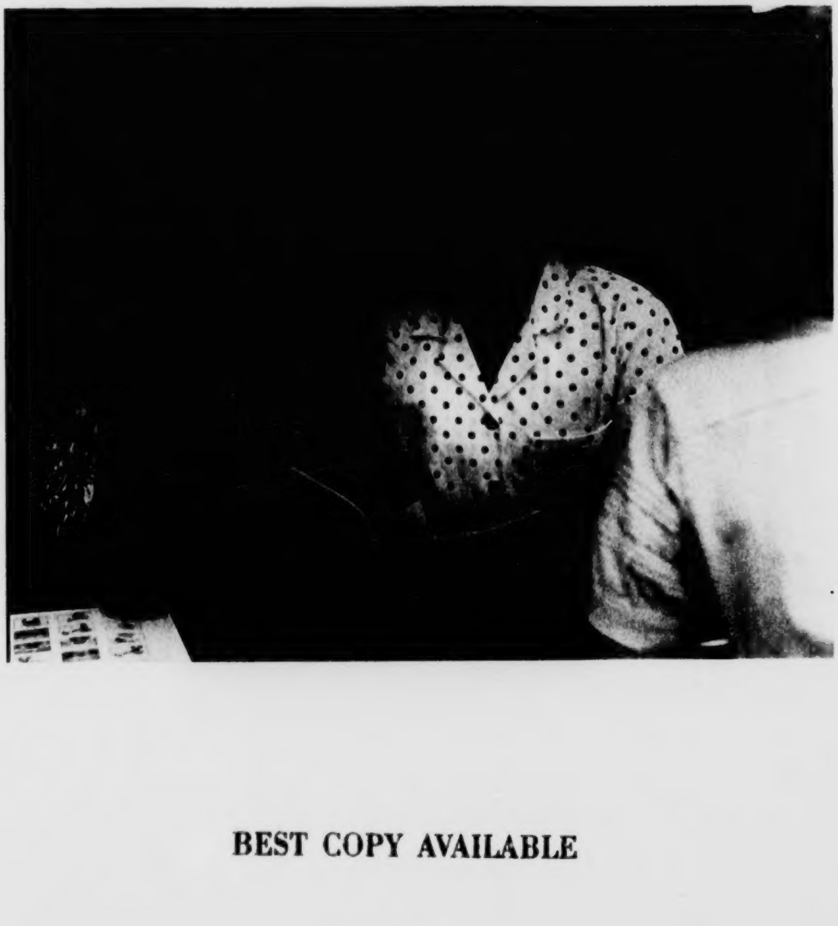
PART I:
CREATING CLASSROOM CULTURES THAT FOSTER DISCUSSION



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CHAPTER 1

A New View of Discussion

Janice F. Almasi

The view of discussion presented in this volume is radically different from the depiction of traditional postreading "discussions." This chapter will explore more traditional definitions of discussion and contrast them with a new view of discussion—a definition that views discussions as a forum for collaboratively constructing meaning and for sharing responses. Additionally, the chapter will examine theoretical perspectives and research regarding the cognitive, social-emotional, and affective benefits of discussion.

The new view of discussion that is emerging in the professional literature and classrooms across the United States refers to interactive events in which individuals collaboratively construct meaning or consider alternate interpretations of the text in order to arrive at new understandings. *The American Heritage Dictionary* defines discussion as "consideration of a subject by a group; an earnest conversation" (p. 532). Thus, discussion supposes cognitive engagement to the extent that the participants are actively involved in a dialogic conversation with one another rather than passively reciting answers to questions that may not be personally meaningful.

> ***"The interpretations of the reader are not static, but continually shaped by transactions between the reader's experiences and the new information acquired from the text."***

The authors' definition of "literary discussion" is derived from several theoretical orientations. From a literary standpoint, we believe that meaning is derived from the transaction that occurs between the reader, the text, and the context of the literary act (Bleich, 1978; Iser, 1980; Rosenblatt, 1938/1976; 1978). Thus, the interpretations of the reader are not static, but continually shaped by transactions between the reader's experiences and the new information acquired from the text. Under such circumstances the reader's interpretation constantly evolves, and the interpretation that each person brings to a discussion may ultimately be transformed and shaped by the thoughts and ideas of other group members.

Consequently, we also believe that literacy is inseparable from the cultural and social context in which it occurs; thus, sociocultural and sociolinguistic orientations are also pertinent to our view (Bloome & Bailey, 1992; Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989; Rogoff, 1990). As "interpretive communities" of students and teachers interact, alternate interpretations and divergent views may be forwarded that also have an impact on a person's interpretation (Fish, 1980). Thus, the interactions among group members involve a reciprocity in which the actions and reactions of individuals are influenced by one another as they interpret the text (Gall & Gall, 1976). These interactions of individuals within a social environment are referred to as "events." Meaning is then viewed as being located within the *event* rather than in an individual's mind (Gee, 1992; Heap, 1992). Thus, literacy is viewed as primarily a social endeavor (Bloome, 1985; Bloome & Green, 1992), and discussion is viewed as a primary component of the literacy process.

Throughout this volume it is this view of discussion, rather than the view of a recitation, which is intended as authors describe interactions between and among teachers and students. One of the most intriguing comparisons between recitations and discussions occurs when teachers consider students' definitions of discussion. As will be demonstrated, when students participate in recitations, their definitions of postreading discussions suggest that they view them as evaluative events in which they perform for their teacher. However, students participating in classroom cultures in which they have experienced authentic discussion, as defined above, tend to define the purpose of discussions differently than students in recitations:

- We have discussions so that if you don't understand the story you might be able to understand it better if you talk about it. (Jimmy, 4th grade)
- Discussions are to tell what *you* think about the story—to explain why you liked the story and why you didn't. (Bridget, 4th grade)

(Almasi, 1993)

These students' definitions suggest a collaborative environment in which the goal of the event is to share viewpoints, provide a rational argument, and work together to come to new understandings about literature.

TRADITIONAL DISCUSSIONS

"We have discussions so the kids who go to the bathroom can know what they missed." (Corrine, 4th grade)

Corrine's view of discussion differs in many ways from that of researchers and teachers. However, her definition reflects her understanding of a phenomenon based upon the classroom culture that has evolved among the teacher and students in the literate community to which she belongs. Because the nature of classroom literature discussions may vary from classroom to classroom, definitions of discussion occurring in elementary classrooms can vary widely as well.

According to Barr and Dreeben (1991), the format for discussing literature that many children have been exposed to in elementary classrooms is characterized by teacher talk and literal questions rather than student involvement and thinking. These notions have been supported in numerous settings, including research conducted in authentic classroom settings (Almasi, 1995; Almasi & Gambrell, 1994) and survey research at the national level (Foertsch, 1992; Langer, Applebee, Mullis, & Foertsch, 1990). The interaction patterns that occur between teachers and students in these traditional discussions are dominated by recurrent sequences of teacher questions and student answers. The questions asked during these interactions generally require students to recall what they already know about the literature they have read. These patterns are evidenced in the example below, taken from a discussion of an Encyclopedia Brown mystery called *The Case of the Crowing Rooster* (Sobol, 1986).

Initiate	Teacher:	What was Encyclopedia Brown doing when Lisa went by on her bicycle?
Respond	Student 10:	He was trimming the hedges.
Evaluate/ Initiate	Teacher:	He was trimming the hedges okay. Where was Lisa going?
Respond	Student 36:	The city dump.
Evaluate	Teacher:	Okay. Why was she going to the city dump?

(Almasi, 1993, Transcript #08-40, December 2, 1992)

Cazden (1986) and Mehan (1979) have referred to the type of interaction depicted above as the I-R-E (Initiate-Respond-Evaluate) participatory structure. In such interactions the teacher initiates a topic by asking a question. In this example, the teacher initiated the discussion by asking a question about what Encyclopedia Brown was doing. Students then responded to the question with an answer: "He was trimming the hedges." The teacher followed by evaluating the student's response. In this case, the teacher responded, "Okay, he was trimming the hedges" which indicates to the students that the response that was given was satisfactory. Within the same turn, the teacher then initiates the sequence again by asking another question. Traditional discussions consist of repetitive chains of this nature providing little opportunity for students to interact with one another. In fact, Almasi (1995) reported that, during episodes of sociocognitive conflict, 85% of such teacher-led discussions were sustained by sequences of I-R-E-like discourse. Additionally, these discussions were dominated by the teacher who was responsible for asking 93% of the questions and for talking 62% of the time.

The type of interaction described above is more appropriately called "recitation" rather than discussion because there is no collaborative attempt to construct meaning; the answers are already known. Students merely recite the answers (Dillon, 1984; Gall & Gall, 1976). As such, the literature that is being discussed is treated as *content* with particular answers that are right and wrong rather than as a *literary work* that must be interpreted (Langer, 1992). Therefore, through the remainder of the chapter the more traditional "discussions" described above will be referred to as "recitations."

> ***"In a discussion, the thoughts, ideas, feelings, and responses of all participants contribute to the event."***

Students involved in recitations may come to view the purpose of these interactions as primarily for the teacher's sake or for assessment purposes, rather than for constructing meaning. This notion is evidenced in their explanations of why children talk about stories after they read them in school:

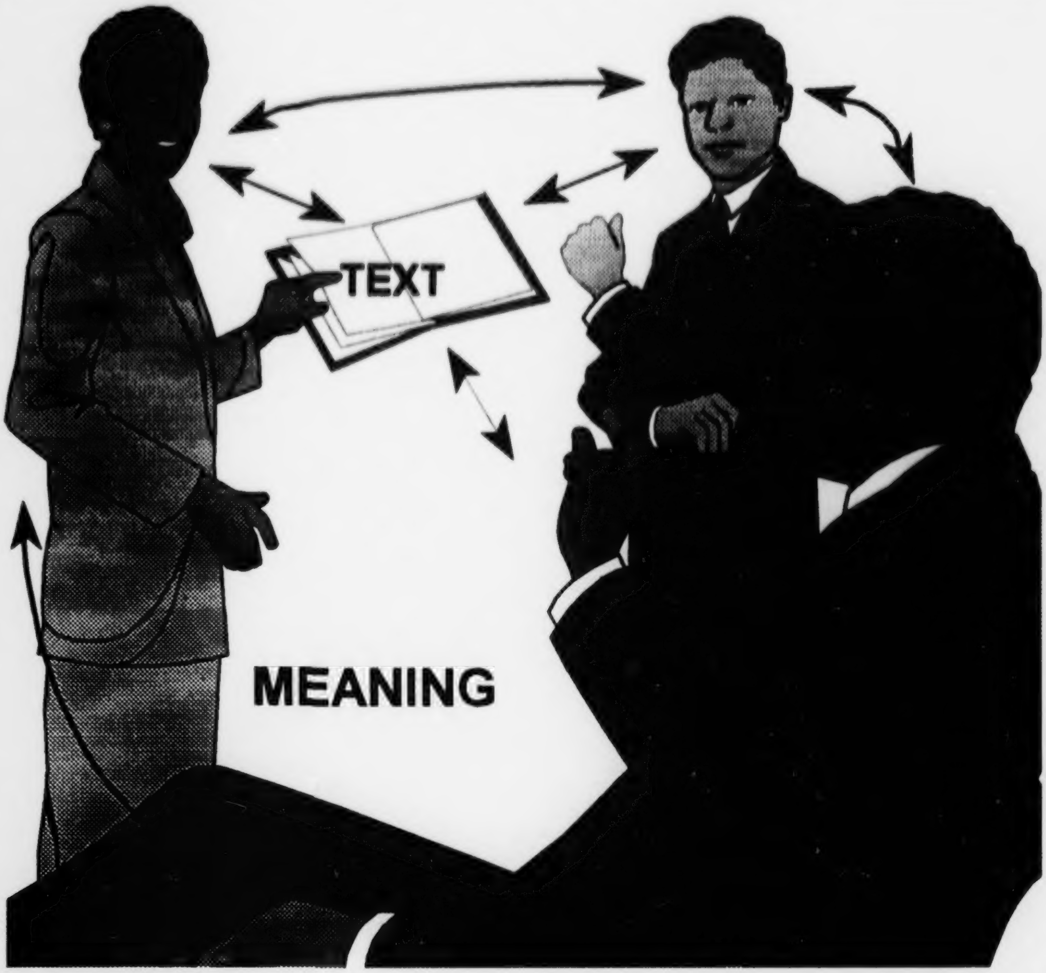
- So that you can answer questions when the teacher asks you them.
  (Kristin, 4th grade)
- So that the teacher can see if you were paying attention or not.
  (Ben, 4th grade)
- So that the teacher knows that we really understand what we read, and so he knows when we can change books or move up or down a level.
  (Alicia, 4th grade)
- So the teacher can know what you're thinking in your mind—he has a little piece of what you think.
  (Greg, 4th grade)
- To see if we know a lot and so that when we do our seatwork we can answer the questions.
  (Laura, 4th grade)

(Almasi, 1993)

COMPARING RECITATIONS AND DISCUSSIONS

Perhaps one of the most profound differences between recitations and discussions lies in the perception of *where* meaning resides. In a discussion, the thoughts, ideas, feelings, and responses of all participants who have read a given text contribute to the event and that event has an influence on a participant's eventual interpretation. Figure 1

Figure 1
A transactional view of discussion: Meaning resides within the event.



depicts the type of transaction that occurs in a discussion. A participant is in transaction with the text or texts he or she has read. As participants gather in social context to exchange thoughts, new understandings and meanings may emerge as participants interact with one another. Thus, as noted above, meaning resides in the event.

In contrast, in a recitation there is little interaction among students, so the teacher is the member of the group whose thoughts might influence a person's interpretation most significantly. The fact that the teacher determines the questions that will be asked, the order of those questions, and the correctness of students' responses to those questions means that the teacher becomes the ultimate interpretive authority in the discussion context. Students will tend to shape the nature of their responses to meet their perceptions of what the teacher wants or to construct an interpretation favored by the teacher. Meaning is then viewed as being located within the text and can be extracted or realized by students through teacher questioning.

Any comparison of recitations and discussions must also take into account the social structures that occur in each context and the rules that govern interaction. The teacher's roles as well as the students' roles provide insight into how these social structures compare within each context (see Figures 2 and 3).

> ***"In a discussion, students tend to assume a multitude of roles that are traditionally reserved for the teacher, such as inquisitor, facilitator, and evaluator as well as the more familiar role of respondent."***

STUDENT ROLES

Students tend to participate differently in discussions than in recitations. In a discussion, students tend to assume a multitude of roles that are traditionally reserved for the teacher, such as inquisitor, facilitator, and evaluator as well as the more familiar role of respondent (see Figure 2).

INQUISITOR. As inquisitor, students ask questions that are personally meaningful because the questions will help them interpret and make sense of the text. In support of this, Almasi (1995) and Almasi and Gambrell (1994) found that most of the questions that are asked in discussions are asked by students (84%) and an overwhelming amount of the discourse (94%) is also contributed by students (Almasi, 1995). From this, we learn that two roles that students often assume in discussions are inquisitor and respondent; they are not only asking questions, but are also engaged in substantive dialogue with one another in their efforts to resolve interpretive issues and make sense of the text. The excerpt below, taken from a fourth grade discussion of *Soup's New Shoes* (Peck, 1986) illustrates how students interact with one another, fluidly assuming roles of inquisitor and respondent throughout the discussion of why the main character, Soup, swapped his new shoes with his friend, Rob, who had ripped his old pair:

Inquisitor	Student 102:	I was wondering why Soup gave his shoes, because if I ever gave my shoes to someone else to wear, my Mom would kill me.

Figure 2
Student roles: Recitations vs. discussions.

Recitations	Discussions
Inquisitor: • Students ask few questions	*Inquisitor:* • Students ask questions in order to understand text better and to help construct meaning
Facilitator of Interaction: • Students are called on by the teacher in order to participate and to maintain topic coherence	*Facilitator of Interaction:* • Students encourage each other to participate • Students are responsible for ensuring that all group members stick to the topic • Students are responsible for ensuring that all group members take turns
Facilitator of Interpretation: • Students do not determine the interpretive strategies that are used during the discussion	*Facilitator of Interpretation:* • Students restate or try to question what others have said if it is not clear • Students may relate topic or issue to their own experiences in order to assist understanding • Students may compare/contrast characters • Students may discuss author's style and craft
Respondent: • Students respond to the teacher's questions	*Respondent:* • Students respond to each other's questions
Evaluator: • Students' responses are evaluated by the teacher	*Evaluator:* • Students try to challenge each other's ideas by telling whether they agree or disagree and by telling why

Respondent	Student 43:	[He] probably just [gave his friend his shoes] for the school day and then they traded back.
Respondent	Student 69:	Probably since like he might have something to do that night [and needed] like a good pair of shoes to wear.
Respondent	Student 48:	When they traded shoes Soup asked, "How does your shoe fit?" and Rob said, "Your shoes are a little bit big for me. How are mine, how do mine feel?" "Well," said Soup, "one is awfully tight and one is awfully loose."

Respondent Student 43: He [Soup] gave him the shoes so he would stop crying, but they'll probably trade back at the end of the day.

Respondent Student 71: But they might not trade back.

Respondent Student 102: I bet they will. You traded shoes!

Respondent Student 48: But his Mom would be very upset.

Inquisitor Student 71: If you paid for your own shoes, would your Mom be upset if you ripped 'em?

Respondent Student 48: No.

Respondent Student 102: If you paid for 'em, you can do whatever you want with 'em.

Respondent Student 8: I think Soup's Mom would not be upset, because it doesn't tell you in the story.

Respondent Student 69: It doesn't tell you anything about his Mom in the story.

(Almasi, 1993, Transcript #08-41, December 2, 1992)

Notice in this example that the pattern of interaction among students differs from the I-R-E pattern that typified recitations. After a question, rather than one response followed by an evaluation, students offered several responses to the inquiry. The discussion is focused because students' responses are relevant to the topic and they are able to share their thoughts and ideas and relate to their own personal experiences.

FACILITATOR. Students also begin to facilitate their own interactions by encouraging group members to actively participate once teachers relinquish the responsibility to them. In the following example, student 65 demonstrates this as the students are discussing *McBroom Tells the Truth* (Fleischman, 1989). Knowing that many of the other group members have often dominated aspects of the discussion, and knowing that student 71 was relatively passive, student 65 encourages him to join in the discussion:

Student 102: I liked the story because it was a nice story to read, and it tells how he [McBroom] was almost cheated out of his nice farm, but when he found out what a rich top soil it had, and all the things he planted grew in a few hours he...

Student 94: I like this story because I have a book like this story, and it's kinda like people living on the farm and buying land from someone else.

Student 65: 71, what do you think about the story?

Student 71: I think it's good. I like it.

Student 65: Would you tell it to a friend?

Student 102: I think it was a nice story, and I would share it with my friend or someone because it was a funny story, and it had lots of things happening in it and...

Student 48: As I read the story I liked it, and then when I got on the bus I told my friend about it, and they thought it is a good story because it is about the western, and it is about some of the old times and took place when there were pioneers.

Student 8: This story reminded me of when we grew a lot of vegetables in our backyard.

(Almasi, 1993, Transcript #03-41, October 14, 1992)

In this example we see how student 65 effectively took on a new role to foster interaction among his peers and to encourage the quieter student (71) to join the discussion. After receiving a very limited, but affirmative response from student 71, we see how student 65 encouraged further participation by asking whether he would tell it to a friend. Although student 71 yielded to the more dominant student 102, he may not have joined in the discussion at all had student 65 not assumed the role of facilitator and encouraged his participation. Throughout the ensuing weeks student 71's classmates continued to encourage him to participate, and after the first semester he was actively participating by asking thought provoking questions and making insightful responses.

EVALUATOR. Another role that students often assume is evaluator. In this role, however, students do not necessarily assess the accuracy of their peers' comments, but offer alternative or divergent viewpoints. In the following example, these fourth grade students have read Levy's *Something Strange at the Ballpark* (1986). They are sharing their opinions about the story as well as how they might improve it:

Student 48: I like the story because I like baseball.

Student 71: I liked the story because it's a mystery.

Student 65: I like the characters, and I wish instead of the baseball bat got stolen, I wanted the glove to get stolen.

Student 69: I know, rather than the baseball bat, but I'd rather the glove [interruptions from other members] the glove, I mean the baseball bat, because you can't play without a glove, you can play without a baseball bat because you can just borrow someone else's.

Student 94: I wish nothing got stolen because it's not nice to steal other things.

Student 102: But it's a mystery so they have to steal something.

All: [nod heads affirmatively in agreement]

(from Almasi, 1993, Transcript #05-41, October 28, 1992)

After hearing student 94's comment, "I wish nothing got stolen because it's not nice to steal other things," student 102 assumes the role of evaluator in that he rejects the comment based upon what he knows about the mystery genre. His reminder captures the attention and approval of the other group members. Examples such as this suggest that not every response is accepted in a discussion. If members are listening intently and truly attempting to collaboratively come to new understanding, some responses further the group's progress, and others may not. In this case, student 94's comment was not denounced, but became less acceptable in light of what the students brought into the discussion based upon their knowledge of mysteries. Such conflicts promote critical and evaluative thinking that differs from the passive role that students assume during recitation as they await the evaluative commentary of their teachers. As we have seen in these brief examples, when given the opportunity to assume roles typically reserved for teachers, students readily adopt them into their own repertoire.

In the new view of discussion presented in this text, students clearly play a much more active role in the meaning construction process. As inquisitors they negotiate the topics for discussion that are of interest and concern to them, as respondents they are actively involved in reacting to the thoughts of their peers, as facilitators they steer the discussion and maintain responsibility for their actions, and as evaluators they demonstrate their ability to listen and to think critically about their peers' comments.

TEACHERS' ROLES

The teacher's role in a discussion also shifts in comparison to his or her role in a recitation (see Figure 3). In a discussion teachers act more as facilitators, scaffolding student interaction and interpretation when needed. In the following example, taken from a fourth grade discussion of *If You Say So, Claude* (Nixon, 1989), we see how the teacher scaffolds students' interpretations by encouraging them to provide a rationale for their response. Likewise, by encouraging students to share whether they agree or disagree with others' comments, the teacher also encourages students to assume the role of evaluator within the discussion:

Student 41: At the end of the story it says, "She gave Claude the biggest smile he'd ever seen anyone come up with, " and she said, "If you say so Claude." I like that part at the end of the story.

Student 54: I liked the part right here. It says, "Shirley's aim was never good, so she missed the rabbit. The old bullet bounced off the rock and back and forth across the canyon, whanging and banging, and zinging and zanging, making a terrible racket. Shirley and the rabbit just froze, staring wide-eyed at each other."

Teacher: Okay, I noticed one thing is we're doing a very good job of people finding parts that they like and giving their opinion. But I don't get to hear why we liked it, or if someone else agrees or disagrees. Also, what does that part mean to you? Okay? Let's develop these topics a little bit.

The discourse that immediately follows the teacher's scaffolding shows the students' initial attempts to improve their discussion:

Student 93: Um, on the that one page where I said where that wild hog was, it um, at first I didn't know what she was holding onto. And then when I read more it said the snake wrapped around it and it was squeezing it to death.

Student 54: I agree, I agree because the snake—it didn't look like a snake.

Student 93: I know. It didn't really look like a snake.

Student 45: It looked like she was just holding it with her palm of. . .

Student 54: ...hand, like that [demonstrates].

Student 93: Uh huh [nods affirmatively].

Student 54: You could tell, but when you got closer to it you could see the tongue and the head.

Student 45: Yeah, uh huh. I agree because the head, like the snake's tongue's hanging out, and she's squeezing the snake and holding it, the hog, the wild hog, at the same time.

(Almasi, 1993, Transcript #03-11, October 14, 1992)

As a facilitator of the interaction and interpretation, the teacher fosters discussion that is more focused around a central topic; the discussion begins to lead children to richer understandings and interpretations.

One of the traditional roles reserved for teachers in a recitation is the evaluation of students' responses. This role is necessary if one subscribes to the notion that there is one correct interpretation that can be found in a text. However, in the new view of discussion, where meaning is located in the event and that meaning may be different to different individuals, teachers are not in pursuit of evaluating the *adequacy* of students' knowledge (Orsolini & Pontecorvo, 1992), or the *content* of a reader's memory as it compares to one literal meaning of the text (Pressley, et al., 1992).

In order to evaluate students' success in a discussion, teachers must consider the question: What must students do in a discussion to show that they are knowledgeable? Typically, we have assumed that comprehension was the primary indicator of a student's knowledge. During recitations, such knowledge is often demonstrated by stu-

Figure 3
Teacher roles: Recitations vs. discussions.

Recitations	Discussions
Inquisitor: • Teacher asks most of the questions • Teacher's questions are usually predetermined and are text-based in nature	*Inquisitor:* • Teacher asks few questions • Teachers may occasionally model good questioning for students by asking an open-ended question that encourages student participation
Facilitator of Interaction: • Teacher coordinates/determines who responds to questions • Most of the interaction and discourse flows through the teacher	*Facilitator of Interaction* • Teacher encourages as much interaction as possible among students • Interaction does not flow through teacher
Facilitator of Interpretation: • Teacher's questions often lead students to a single interpretation of text • Teacher often offers insight into own interpretation of text	*Facilitator of Interpretation:* • Teacher remains neutral on interpretational issues
Respondent: • Teacher usually does at least 50% of the talking	*Respondent:* • Teacher remains silent as much as possible
Evaluator: • Teacher gives feedback as to the correctness of students' responses almost immediately through either verbal or nonverbal means	*Evaluator:* • Teacher exploits only the best opportunities to give feedback on interaction or interpretational issues

dents as they respond to teacher-initiated questions that tend to be literal in nature (Gall, 1984). Retellings of story events have also been suggested as an assessment task for measuring comprehension (Johnston, 1983; Mandler & Johnson, 1977; Stein & Glenn, 1979) and have been shown to enhance recall and comprehension of text (Gambrell, Pfeiffer, & Wilson, 1985).

Knowledgeable students in such interactions can accurately recall and retell textual information. Both of these methods of determining knowledge focus on assessing an end *product*. This view of knowledge implies that there is a solitary interpretation inherent to the text that can be extracted and verbalized by students. It is assumed that such verbalization during a discussion displays a student's understanding or comprehension of the text. However, such practice denies the importance of the social context in the evolution of a person's understanding (Carlsen, 1991), and not only suggests that there is a single, correct meaning to the text, but that the reader's understanding is complete upon entering a discussion (Langer, 1992).

Our understanding of what illustrates students' knowledge during discussions focuses on the *process* by which they come to an understanding or an interpretation of text. This view recognizes and celebrates the role of culture and society in shaping a student's evolving interpretations during the literary transaction. Thus, the learning that occurs and the knowledge that is displayed within discussions of literature cannot be examined without taking the activity, context, and classroom culture into account (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989). The knowledge that students display may be evident in their ability to demonstrate communicative competence in their interactions with others (Bloome & Bailey, 1992). This may mean that students display their ability to initiate topics of conversation, link information that they want to communicate to what has already been discussed, respond to the comments of others, and speak in a manner that enables them to be understood by others.

Knowledge may also be displayed in terms of a student's interpretive abilities. We may need to look at the process by which a group constructs meaning and look at what interpretive abilities a student is able to exhibit in a particular circumstance. Such knowledge may involve an ability to compare characters, make intertextual connections to other books, challenge the author's style of writing, or critically examine the text from more than one perspective.

The teacher's role as evaluator during discussions moves from assessing the correctness of students' responses to evaluating the process by which students construct meaning. Similarly, teachers act more as facilitators who scaffold students' attempts as they learn to interact meaningfully and thoughtfully about text.

BENEFITS OF DISCUSSION

Vygotsky (1978) theorized that social environments provide learners with the opportunity to observe higher levels of cognitive processing. From this perspective, discussions of literature may be viewed as a social environment in which students can witness how group members work together to collaboratively construct meaning while also participating in the process.

Learning, in this situation, may occur incidentally as the learner observes the cognitive processes of fellow group members as they develop an interpretation.

Learning may also be more direct when teachers or peers function as more knowledgeable participants and scaffold the interaction so that the learner becomes capable of achieving more with their assistance than they could have independently (Rogoff, 1990; Vygotsky, 1978).

The benefits of participating in classroom discussions of literature are numerous. From a cognitive standpoint, students may gradually internalize some of the interpretive behaviors that are associated with higher levels of thinking. From a social perspective, students may develop better competence during social interactions. Participation may also elicit affective benefits as students begin to enjoy reading literature. Thus, the values of engaging students in discussion are numerous and center around cognitive, social, and affective dimensions.

> ***"Discussions of literature may be viewed as a social environment in which students can witness how group members work together to collaboratively construct meaning."***

COGNITIVE BENEFITS OF ENGAGING IN DISCUSSION

Student 71: I wonder why um Soup said in the shoe store the guy had an X-ray machine?
Student 102: I don't know why 'cuz why would a shoe salesman buy that kind of equipment just to sell shoes?
Student 43: They usually have just the foot measuring thing. You take off your shoes and stick your foot on it.
Student 48: Not a machine. They didn't have them back then.
Student 69: An X-ray machine—he's probably like a doctor and a shoe salesman in one.
Student 71: That's what I thought.
(overtalk)
Student 71: He [the main character] said it was for to see if the foot fit the shoe.
Student 48: Like how big your bones are, and how much you had to grow.
Student 102: If you want to see your skin on an X-ray machine—what's an X-ray machine for?
Student 48: That's true.
Student 43: Because just to see if the foot could fit in the shoe. Because your skin's gonna be over the bone when it goes into the shoe.

Student 102: Well actually the X-ray machine is just so you can see how big your foot really is. The skin will just cover it up.

(Almasi, 1993, Transcript #08-41, December 2, 1992)

Participation in collaborative discussions provides students with a number of cognitive benefits that are illustrated in this example from a fourth grade group discussion of *Soup's New Shoes*. Students are naturally inquisitive, and when afforded the opportunity to verbalize their wonderings about text, as student 71 does in this example, students exhibit their ability to monitor their understanding.

When students ask questions such as the ones in the example, it is generally because they are attempting to arrive at an interpretation of the text. In this instance the students could not understand why a shoe salesman would need to have an X-ray machine. Thus, they were experiencing a conflict between their understanding of the modern uses of X-ray machines and the use suggested in the text. Given that the setting for the story was in the 1930s it may be that students were having difficulty relating to the use of a medical tool for another purpose.

From a cognitive perspective, when students are encouraged to verbalize these conflicts they learn how to raise uncertainties in their understandings, explain and justify their positions, seek information to help them resolve the uncertainty, and learn to see alternative points of view (Almasi, 1995; Brown & Palincsar, 1989; Doise & Mugny, 1984; Johnson & Johnson, 1979; Mugny & Doise, 1978; Webb & Palincsar, in press).

Another cognitive benefit is that students can learn from one another in their interactions. In a collaborative discussion, one student can assist another student who may have an uncertainty. Thus, peers can function as tutors for one another as they learn how to interpret text. In the example below we see student 13 raising an uncertainty about the dog's action in the story *Something Strange at the Ballpark*.

Student 13: Why did the dog jump up when someone pulled his tail?

Student 52: Because...

Student 89: Because someone pulled his tail.

Student 52: Nuh uh. He smelled the scent. He smelled the scent of the glove so he ran after Marshall.

Student 13: [reading from text] "He jumped up as if someone had pulled his tail." Nobody pulled his tail. He jumped up *as if* someone had pulled his tail, but no one pulled his tail.

Student 89: It says right here, "Jill tied it [invisible string] to Fletcher's tail." The baseball glove was a trap. Jill tied it to Fletcher's tail [with invisible string].

Student 13: Detective kit
Student 52: Oh yeah! I get it!
Student 89: Right there. Look. Read it.
Student 52: See look it's...it's...it says, "Jill tied it to Fletcher's tail. She..."
Student 89: "...used invisible string from my detective kit."

(Almasi, 1993, Transcript #05-61, October 28, 1992)

In this example we see students working through the "zone of proximal development" (Vygotsky, 1978) as they take turns instructing one another. Initially student 13 functioned in the role of learner and students 89 and 52 as tutors as they shared their thoughts. Unsatisfied with this information, student 13 then enacted a cognitive strategy whereby she sought information from the text to help her resolve her conflict. The information that she found was enough to convince the other students to alter their interpretations. Over time student 13's enactment of the cognitive strategy of referring to the text to resolve uncertainty may gradually be internalized by other group members who may use it at other points to resolve their own uncertainties or those raised by other group members. Thus, when students are provided with the opportunity to interact with one another they are exposed to a variety of higher cognitive functions that enable them to gradually internalize such functions (Almasi, 1995; Almasi & Gambrell, 1994).

When students share their thoughts with others their thoughts become an object that can be reflected upon. By sharing, these thoughts are made available to all group members for inspection and provide an opportunity to expand a student's limited perceptions. Thus, student interaction in discussions may be an important factor in promoting the ability to think critically and to consider multiple perspectives (Prawat, 1989) and in developing the ability to confirm, extend, and modify their individual interpretations of texts (Eeds & Wells, 1989; Leal, 1992).

Also evident in the examples above is that when students are given autonomy to explore their own topics for discussions of literature, the quality of their discourse is enhanced. Students who participate in discussions of text not only engage in more dialogue about text, but the quality of their discourse is more complex than the dialogue of studnts who participate in more traditional teacher-led recitations (Almasi, 1995; Almasi & Gambrell, 1994; Eeds & Wells, 1989; Leal, 1992; Sweigart, 1991). Additionally, when teachers provided greater opportunities for students to share their opinions about a text, the types of responses that students

> ***“Peers can function as tutors for one another as they learn how to interpret text.”***

share broaden (Martinez, Roser, Hoffman, & Battle, 1992) and reflect their personal reactions to the text (McGee, 1992).

Social-Emotional Benefits of Engaging In Discussion

During discussions of literature the focus is on the process by which interpretations are constructed through interaction and the negotiation of meaning within the social context of the classroom. Students learn to become literate by being involved in the types of processes that are central to the social transmission of knowledge in a given society (Cook-Gumperz, 1986). Part of the discussion culture involves the participatory roles that individuals assume within the group. Students and teachers tend to assume static roles during interactions characterized as "recitations" (Baxter, 1988). Teachers assume the role of inquisitor and evaluator, and students assume the role of respondent. In classroom discussions of literature that feature extensive dialogue and interaction, students assume a variety of roles and are able to assume roles that are typically reserved for the teacher (McMahon 1992; O'Flahavan; 1989).

Within classroom discussions, the responsibility for learning is transferred from teacher to students. In such an environment students come to believe that they can control their own learning as they learn how to interact with one another (Alvermann, O'Brien, & Dillon, 1990; O'Flahavan, 1989; Slavin, 1990). The example below displays how the teacher functions as a scaffold in terms of teaching students strategies for interacting more effectively. The teacher demonstrates that the students have shifted topics several times without exploring any of the issues in detail. This type of behavior lets students know that they are not maintaining a topic of conversation and also reminds them to avoid topic changes.

Student 54: One of my questions is why is the black stallion so rough?

Student 61: One of my questions is why does he ride every year?

Student 46: I think that Grandpa was brave to ride Rolling Thunder and strong to keep holding the...

Teacher: Before you go on let me just throw something out to you. We just had one person ask a question, another person ask a question, and another person give a comment. We have three different things going on, and we didn't finish any of them. Let's just take one at a time, finish it, and then go on.

Student 41: I wouldn't want to ride Rolling Thunder because he's too rough, and even if people would give me $500 I would not ride him. I would not want to get launched from a horse.

Student 54: The black stallion is so rough because he's wild, and he's not used to being tame.

Student 57: He's not used to being *rode*.
Student 61: [to Student 54] You're changing the subject.

(Almasi, 1993, Transcript #02-11, October 7, 1992)

Within a span of a few minutes the teacher's suggestion was acted upon by the students. In this case, student 61 assumed responsibility for monitoring the group's ability to maintain topics and pointed out to student 54 that he had changed the subject away from the question of why Grandfather rides the horse every year, back to the earlier unresolved topic of why the horse was so rough. Thus, students involved in discussions not only learn how to interact socially and develop communicative competence, but they learn to take responsibility for their own learning.

> ***"Students involved in discussions not only learn how to interact socially and develop communicative competence, but they learn to take responsibility for their own learning."***

From another perspective, student involvement in discussions has benefits in terms of social-emotional issues related to the way students perceive their own competence, as well as their attitudes toward others. Slavin (1990) reported that student participation in discussions increases self-esteem while fostering positive attitudes and friendships among students of different races or ethnic backgrounds; acceptance of mainstreamed academically handicapped students; positive relationships among classmates; cooperation with others; support from classmates; and the ability to identify others' viewpoints and understand their feelings.

AFFECTIVE BENEFITS OF ENGAGING IN DISCUSSIONS

A recent reanalysis of the National Assessment of Educational Progress database found that social interaction was positively associated with reading activity (Guthrie, Schafer, Wang, & Afflerbach, 1995). In particular, students of all ages who talked with their friends and parents about what they read were more active readers than students who engaged in less discourse about their literate behaviors. This information is consistent with the findings of Morrow and Weinstein (1986) who reported that scope of reading increased when students and teachers participated in discussion and debate about the ideas present in the texts they read.

These findings suggest that students who talk about what they read are more likely to engage in reading. When students have the opportunity to discuss what they read they are also more likely to respond aesthetically by sharing their thoughts and emotions about the text as they read it (Many & Wiseman, 1992). This is evidenced in the excerpt below taken from a fourth grade discussion of *If You Say So, Claude.*

Student 69: I did not like part of the story because there are just two main characters. They didn't really say anything about them or their house. They didn't tell you anything about it at all.

Student 65: See I thought that Shirley was the only main character. I didn't think Claude was a main character.

Students 69: But it keeps on saying, "If you say so Claude."

Student 102: Yes, but Claude was hardly in it, but Shirley was the main...

Student 65: But Shirley was saying it.

Student 71: Did I say that this story reminded me of when I was in Baltimore? They got stuff like this. They got horses and they carried something, but it wasn't called a wagon.

Student 94: It reminded me of when I went to this place close to my house. They had people with hats...I should say bonnets that they wore on their heads.

Student 102: Like Student 69 said, there weren't too many characters. I think they should have added more characters in this story.

Student 94: My favorite character was Claude.

Student 102: I thought that this was a funny story because she [Shirley] did not have good aim, and she was making the bullets fire everywhere and it never hit anything like the bobcat. It hit the tree and things were falling off and tumbling down the hill.

Student 65: Well I think she did not have good aim because she didn't aim.

(Almasi, 1993, Transcript #04-41, October 22, 1992)

In this excerpt students offer their reactions to the characters as well as the author's style of writing when they suggest that perhaps more characters would have improved the story. Additionally, students were able to relate parts of the story to their own experiences.

> ***"Students who talk about what they read are more likely to engage in reading."***

Students also benefit from discussions because they often make discoveries about themselves as individuals and as learners. Their responses reflect their beliefs and attitudes as well as their learning strategies. In the following example these fourth graders are sharing their reactions to *McBroom Tells the Truth.* The students are sharing their reactions when they first encountered the names of all 11 of McBroom's children as it appeared in the text, "I turned to our children, 'Will*jill*hester*chester*peter*polly*tim*tom*mary*larry*andlittle*clarinda*.'"

> Student 102: First [when I saw the name] I am like, "What does this word say?" Then I say all the Will, Jill, and everyone. I was surprised that they had all those kids. I was thinking they might have had some space between the names, but they were all next to each other so I thought it was one name.
>
> Student 94: When I saw it for the first time I skipped it and read the story to the end, and then I came back to that, and I was figuring out what it said.
>
> Student 65: I think that it is weird.
>
> (Almasi, 1993, Transcript #03-41, October 14, 1992)

By sharing their reactions to the unusual text as well as their strategies for handling the text, students revealed their own learning strategies, which may help them come to new understandings about the text and themselves.

As students participate in discussions of literature, there are many opportunities for cognitive, social, emotional, and affective growth. When classroom cultures allow opportunities for authentic discussion, students' perceptions of the literary process, as well as their literary competence, are affected in ways that reflect that culture. Views of discussion as merely an assessment tool for the teacher may give way to views that highlight the importance of talk to the construction of meaningful interpretations of literature.

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CHAPTER 2

What Research Reveals About Discussion

Linda B. Gambrell

> A traditional homily tells us that fish would be the least likely creatures to ever become aware of water. For those of us who teach, talk surrounds us and it also constitutes our primary mode of action. It is our medium, our atmosphere, and also our substance. And it is therefore invisible to us much of the time. Because talk is invisible to us, we rarely treat it as a matter of deliberate concern for teaching and learning.
>
> Rubin, 1990, p.5

The three purposes of this chapter are to present a brief rationale for the current resurgence of interest in the role of discussion in the reading and language arts curriculum, to place discussion in proper perspective with respect to other kinds of verbal interactions, and to summarize what research reveals about discussion. The research on discussion is reviewed along two lines, first with particular emphasis on how engaging in discussion helps students learn, and second, on factors that influence discussion.

MAKING DISCUSSION VISIBLE

This chapter focuses on research conducted primarily in elementary classrooms in order to describe what we know about the effects of discussion on student learning. It is important for us to understand how discussion contributes to learning because of the skill, time, and effort that are necessary for creating classroom cultures that foster engagement in discussion. How does discussion facilitate learning? Is it worth the time and effort? What teacher behaviors facilitate discussion? These are questions that researchers and educators have pondered for centuries.

> *“Discussion brings together listening, speaking, and thinking skills as participants engage in exchanging ideas, responding, and reacting to text as well as to the ideas of others.”*

Currently there is a resurgence of interest in small group discussion, particularly as it relates to reading comprehension and learning from text. As evidenced by the number of recent articles in literacy journals describing current classroom practices related to small group discussion, and recent research exploring the effects of discussion on student outcomes, it is clear that discussion is becoming increasingly more visible in both our educational literature and our classrooms (Barton, 1995; Commeyras, 1994; Horowitz & Freeman, 1995; Roller & Beed, 1994; Villaume & Hopkins, 1995; Villaume, Worden, Williams, Hopkins, & Rosenblatt, 1994; Wiencek & O'Flahavan, 1994).

Any attempt to review the research on discussion must begin by examining the nature and definition of discussion itself. Educational theorists and researchers often present a view of discussion that is idealized as something that should be strived for because it allows for greater student expression and involvement and results in increased learning. Furthermore, this idealized model is usually part of a Vygotskian framework that views social interaction as effectively driving cognitive development (Vygotsky, 1978). Within this framework, discussion is essentially dialogic: it is not completely controlled by a single participant; rather it occurs as natural conversation in which individuals engage in a free and open exchange of ideas. According to Lindfors (1990), effective discussions are an “ongoing process of inviting and sustaining children's talk and response...as they carry out their deepest human urgings: to connect with others, to understand their world, and to reveal themselves within it” (p. 38).

A RESURGENCE OF INTEREST IN DISCUSSION

The resurgence of interest in discussion may be attributed to current theories and practices in reading and language arts. First, there is increasing evidence that teachers are now making greater use of literature in the reading and language arts program than ever before (Gambrell, 1992; Strickland, 1995). Moreover, literature is particularly appropriate for use with a wide range of student-centered activities that include response to and interpretation of what an author has written. Therefore, in classrooms where literature is the foundation of the reading program, discussion takes on a more important role as students participate in literature circles, idea circles, book clubs, and reader-response groups.

A second reason for the increasing interest in discussion is the emphasis on the meaningful integration of the language arts. Discussion brings together listening, speaking, and thinking skills as participants engage in exchanging ideas, responding, and reacting to text as well as to the ideas of others.

A third reason is that current theories of learning view students as active learners who engage in the construction of knowledge. These theories suggest that the primary goal of instruction is to help students construct personal meanings in response to new experiences rather than to simply learn the meanings others have created (Poplin, 1988). A fourth reason for the current focus on discussion is the clear link between discussion and the social construction of knowledge. Meaning making is learned through the social interactions of students, especially when they discuss and interpret text in small groups. Ways of meaning making are made public as students observe and participate in discussions about text. According to Straw and Bogdan (1993), engaging in discussions about text can help students become part of the "active conversation that *is* reading, the conversation between the reader and text, between text and community and among readers" (p. 4).

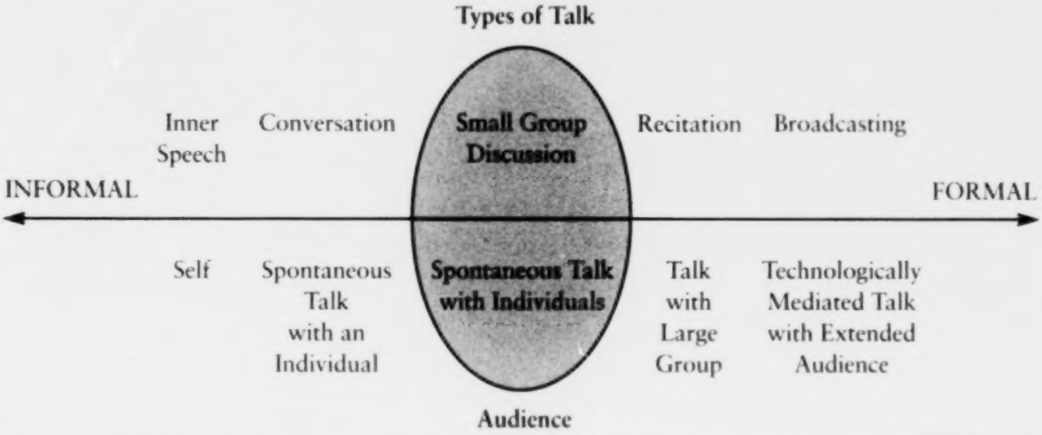
THE PLACE OF DISCUSSION IN THE CONTINUUM OF TALK

Rubin (1990) suggests that one way to describe talk is to think about the range of audiences with whom we can interact. He points out that this widening circle of interactants ranges from talking to ourselves to talking to large audiences. For example, we can engage in intrapersonal communication which is characterized as inner speech or talking to ourselves. When we talk to another person one-on-one, it is characterized as personal conversation. If the conversation includes several individuals we know, it is characterized as small group discussion. When we participate with a larger group of people where there is a definite separation and inequality between the roles of speaker and listener, talk is characterized as public communication or recitation. In this case, one person monologues while the others in the group do not (see Almasi, this volume, for a description of recitations). Finally, when talk is mediated by technology so that there is no definite way of knowing which members of the audience are "tuned in" to the message, it is characterized as broadcasting.

The model of talk presented in Figure 1 draws upon and extends Rubin's (1990) categorization scheme for types of talk. It provides a view of talk that considers several important dimensions of communication. First, talk can be viewed on a continuum of informal to formal talk; second, it can also be consid-

> ***"Response-ability requires social interactions centered around text."***

Figure 1
A model of the continuum of talk.


Types of Talk
Inner Speech
Conversation
Small Group Discussion
Recitation
Broadcasting
INFORMAL
FORMAL
Self
Spontaneous Talk with an Individual
Spontaneous Talk with Individuals
Talk with Large Group
Technologically Mediated Talk with Extended Audience
Audience

ered with respect to different types of talk; and third, it can be viewed in terms of the audiences being addressed. In the model presented in Figure 1, it is worth noting that small group discussion falls in the middle of the continuum of talk, between the informal and more formal modes of communication. Just as small group discussion is the "centerpiece" of the continuum of talk, it is also the central focus of this book. When students engage in small group discussions they have more opportunities to speak, interact, interpret, clarify, and exchange points of view than are afforded in other talk structures.

In the past, typical classroom discussions relied heavily on the public communication or recitation models of interaction, with the teacher as the transmitter of information. Teachers talked and asked questions and students listened and answered teacher-posed questions (White, 1990). This type of teacher-centered instruction provides students with few opportunities to enter into the dialogue of learning. The teacher controls the timing, the structure, and the content of classroom talk, allowing students limited opportunities to develop what Rubin (1990) has referred to as "response-ability."

DISCUSSION AS RESPONSE-ABILITY

If students are to develop critical and creative thinking skills, they must have opportunities to respond to text. The ability to respond to text, or response-ability, is socially mediated and is learned through a process of socialization in the literacy community. Thus, response-ability is nurtured when students have opportunities to negotiate meaning with text and with other members of the interpretive community. By its very nature, response-ability requires social interactions centered around text. In many ways, response-ability reflects the Vygotskian (1978) perspective that the ways in which we think are learned through our social interactions. According to Straw and Bogdan (1993), this perspective "argues for socially based classrooms, classrooms that lead students to the negotiations that are the heart of meaning making in the act of reading" (p. 4).

In many of today's classrooms, students participate more fully in the dialogue of learning as they engage in small group discussions about what they have read. In particular, the research on collaborative learning has encouraged teachers to provide more opportunities for students to work and interact in small groups (Slavin, 1989, 1990). Students are more likely to be involved in collaborative projects and small group discussions where they engage in problem solving and creative thinking. Students are also more likely to be involved in decision making about who talks and about what is discussed during small group discussions. Conversely, teachers are more likely to view themselves as coaches or facilitators who are there to nurture and support children who engage in fruitful and meaningful discussions. This new view of the role of discussion in today's classroom is one in which students have increased opportunities to develop response-ability and higher level thinking skills.

> ***"When students engage in small group discussions they have more opportunities to speak, interact, interpret, clarify, and exchange points of view than are afforded in other talk structures."***

WHAT RESEARCH REVEALS ABOUT DISCUSSION AND STUDENT LEARNING

Much of the existing research on the topic of discussion has centered on the recitation model, and the majority of this research has been conducted with teachers and students at the secondary level (Alvermann, 1986; Alvermann, O'Brien, & Dillon, 1990). Only recently has research begun to focus specifically on small group discussion and its effects on elementary age students' learning (Almasi, 1995; Wiencek & O'Flahavan, 1994). This emerging body of research suggests that there are many positive educational outcomes associated with using small group discussion in elementary classrooms (Gall, 1987; Gall & Gall, 1976, 1990; Gall & Gillett, 1980). In the following section, a brief review of the research is presented which suggests that engaging in discussion about text results in deeper understanding, higher level thinking, and improved communication skills.

DISCUSSION PROMOTES DEEP UNDERSTANDING OF TEXT. A number of research studies on discussion have found that positive effects accrue when children engage in small group discussions about text. Research documents that discussion enhances text recall, aesthetic response to text, and reading comprehension.

Research by Palincsar (1987) and Palincsar and Brown (1984) supports the contention that discussion is an effective method for promoting deep understanding of text. Reading is one of the primary means by which children acquire information. While most children can decode and grasp the meaning of passages they read, many children still have difficulty comprehending text. Palincsar developed and researched the technique of reciprocal teaching that involves students in structured discussions. In reciprocal teaching, a student volunteers to take the role of the teacher and questions other students about what has been read. Other group members are also encouraged to ask questions and make comments. Students engage in asking questions of four types: (a) that ask about important information in the text, (b) that ask for a summary of the text, (c) that ask for clarification of the text, and (d) that ask for predictions about upcoming events or specific content in the text. The results of Palincsar's study revealed that the reciprocal teaching group outperformed comparison groups on reading comprehension.

In Morrow and Smith's (1990) study of kindergarten students, children who engaged in small group discussions of stories that were read aloud had superior story recall compared to students who discussed the story one-on-one with the teacher or participated in whole class discussions. Furthermore, the research of Eeds and Wells (1989) documents the high quality of children's aesthetic responses to text during discussions. Children in their study engaged in constructing meaning and personal interpretation of text, and they modified their interpretations of text as a result of interactions with other group members. Taken together, these studies support the effectiveness of discussion in promoting students' deeper understanding of text.

DISCUSSION INCREASES HIGHER LEVEL THINKING AND PROBLEM-SOLVING ABILITY. Several studies have explored the effects of discussion on the higher level thinking and problem-solving ability of elementary age students. Hudgins and Edelman (1986) examined the effects of participation in small group discussions on the critical thinking of fourth and fifth grade students. Critical thinking was defined as the disposition to provide supporting evidence of a student's conclusions and to request evidence from others before accepting conclusions. Teachers were taught how to reduce the amount of teacher talk in discussion and to encourage students to take responsibility for thinking and talking during discussions. Although there were no significant differences between the experimental group and a control group on a test of critical thinking, an analysis of the discussions revealed that students in the experimental group provided more supporting evidence for conclusions during the discussions as compared to the control group.

A study conducted by Almasi (1995) compared student-led and teacher-led discussion groups. One of the major findings of this study was that in student-led discussions, which allowed the students a more participatory role in the interpretation of text, students engaged in higher level thinking and problem solving. One explanation for this finding is that student-led discussions allow students to try their own thinking and engage in exploratory thinking, resulting in more extended and more elaborate mental representations and higher level analytical thinking. In addition, Almasi (1995) found that student-led discussions resulted in more extensive and higher level discussions than teacher-led discussions. Likewise, the student-led discussions were typified by more student talk, higher level thinking, wider participation from group members, greater cohesion within the group, and richer inquiry.

> ***"Student-led discussions allow students to try their own thinking and engage in exploratory thinking, resulting in more extended and more elaborate mental representations and higher level analytical thinking."***

Studies by Villaume and Hopkins (1995) and Green and Wallet (1981) document ways that students interact with each other during small group discussions. These studies provide numerous examples of how discussion stimulates and serves as a scaffold for students' thinking. In addition, these studies support research showing that in-depth critical thinking is developed through discussion and suggest the need for small group discussion rather than having students respond primarily to teacher questions (Almasi, 1995; Morrow & Smith, 1990).

DISCUSSION IMPROVES COMMUNICATION SKILLS. Recent research by Almasi (1995) and Eeds & Wells (1989) indicates that students' communication skills improve naturally as they become more experienced in small group discussions. Studies on discussion have documented increases in communication behaviors such as the occurrence of student-to-student interaction, recognition and acknowledgment of the previous speaker, requesting verification, and the ability to take on a position different from their own (Almasi, 1995; Goatley & Raphael, 1992; Phillips, 1973).

Discussion has also been a means of helping students develop socially desirable attitudes. For example, discussion can provide students with exposure to information that can change their attitudes or intensify existing attitudes. In a study conducted by Fisher (1968), fifth grade students were randomly assigned to one of three treatment groups. One group read a series of stories designed to promote positive attitudes toward Native Americans; the second group read the same stories and participated in a discussion after reading; the third group served as a control group that neither read the stories nor discussed Native Americans. The major finding from this study was that discussion caused significantly more attitudinal changes as compared to the other two treatment groups, resulting in more positive attitudes toward Native Americans for the group that participated in discussions.

Discussions also help students to develop what Slavin (1977) has called "social connectedness." Engaging students in cooperative learning groups that emphasize discussion and interaction has been found to have positive effects on interracial friendships and interracial attitudes (Slavin, 1977, 1989, 1990). When students are encouraged and supported in interacting with their classmates in small group discussions, they have opportunities to develop the skills and behaviors needed to communicate and work effectively with others.

WHAT RESEARCH REVEALS ABOUT FACTORS THAT AFFECT DISCUSSION

New research reveals a clearer picture of what effective discussion looks like and sounds like. We now know that the quality of discussion is affected by factors such as group size, leadership, text type, and cultural background. In addition, research supports the notion that even young children can engage in and learn from participation in discussion groups and that children with special needs also benefit from engaging in discussion.

DISCUSSION IS INFLUENCED BY TEXT TYPE. Only a few studies to date have explored the relationship between content or text type (narrative or expository) on children's discussions. Leal (1992) conducted a studythat investigated the effect of text type on the quality of children's discussions of stories. Children in grades one, three, and five were assigned to one of three treatment groups where they listened to either a storybook, an information book, or an informational storybook. The informational storybook was based on information but was presented in a narrative format (for example, the *Magic School Bus* series). Results of this study revealed important differences for both grade level and text type. As expected, older students were more successful at collaboration and relied more on peer comments in their discussion. The major finding of the study was that informational storybooks enhanced discussion more than narrative or expository texts. Students across all grade levels offered more speculations and relied more on the comments of peers when discussing the informational storybook as compared to either of the other two text

> *"The quality of discussion is affected by factors such as group size, leadership, text type, and cultural background."*

types. The results of this study suggest that the quality and texture of text-based discussion is influenced by text type.

In a study with kindergartners and second graders, Horowitz and Freeman (1995) found that discussion can play an influential role in students' preference, sense of difficulty, and understanding of author's purpose when asked to process science texts. This study compared discussion before and after listening to two science texts with a no discussion condition. When they engaged in discussion, children in this study preferred an informational science book over a narrative science book. When there was no discussion and the book was simply read to the children, they preferred the narrative science book. In addition, the children perceived the books that were discussed to be easier, and they had better comprehension of the books that were discussed. Horowitz and Freeman (1995) concluded that discussion can create a conceptual change about text and can result in a preference for a text that students initially find to be of limited interest or appeal. This research suggests that discussions have the potential for increasing children's curiosity, broadening their interest, and restructuring their preferences for text.

DISCUSSION IS INFLUENCED BY GROUP SIZE. A relatively large number of studies provide information about the effect of group size on the quality and outcomes of discussion and suggest that small group discussions provide individual students with more opportunities to speak. Wiencek and O'Flahavan (1994) indicate that group size should be large enough to ensure diversity of ideas, yet small enough so that each student has an opportunity to fully participate. In an analysis of 10 research studies investigating small group discussions with kindergarten and elementary age students, Spence (1993) found that the range of small group size was from 3 to 14 participants and that most researchers defined a "small group" as five or six students.

In a classic study with kindergarten students, Morrow and Smith (1990) compared the following group structures: one-to-one (student/teacher), small groups of 3 students, and whole class (15 students). The children in these groups listened to a story and then discussed it. Assessment was conducted using free recalls of the story. The results revealed that the small group structure yielded significantly superior story recall as compared to the other two group structures. Morrow and Smith (1990) concluded that the small group discussion structure facilitates literacy development because students have more opportunity to speak, interact, discuss, and exchange points of view than in other group structures. Other studies conducted with elementary age to high school age students provide consistent and compelling evidence in support of the superior quality of discussions that areconducted within the small group structure (Davidson, 1985; Palincsar, Brown, & Martin, 1987; Rogers, 1991; Sweigart, 1991).

> *"Leadership affects the interaction patterns and the level of thinking that transpires during discussions."*

DISCUSSION IS INFLUENCED BY LEADERSHIP. Most of the studies on discussion involve a teacher or researcher who acts as a group leader, actually taking part in the group interaction. Some studies have examined only student-led discussions (Goatley & Raphael, 1992; Short, 1992), and others have compared teacher-led versus student-led discussions (Almasi, 1995; Wiseman, et al., 1992). The results of these studies indicate that the leadership (teacher-led, student-led, or shared leadership) affects the interaction patterns and the level of thinking that transpires during discussions. The discussions are most productive and students are more engaged in discussions when the teacher serves as a guide and facilitator to help children gain interpretive authority. Thus, a number of studies have involved training either students (Goatley & Raphael, 1992; Martinez, et al., 1992), teachers (Palincsar, 1986), or both students and teachers (Almasi, 1995; Wiseman et al., 1992) in order to create a discussion structure in which students have real control and authority.

Several studies have suggested that teachers play an important role in supporting students in the development of discussion skills as well as the development of higher level thinking skills. The research of O'Flahavan and his colleagues (1992) suggests that if teachers remove themselves completely from influencing the discussion process, it is likely that children's responses to literature will not develop and grow. McGee's (1992) research with first graders indicates that although it is important for children to explore stories on their own terms, teachers can facilitate higher level discussion by focusing the conversation around a teacher-posed interpretive question.

Clearly, students profit from having the freedom to explore their own agendas during discussions; however, it appears that they also profit from teacher guidance. Students need the freedom to express divergent ideas and interpretations of text, but they also need some direction in how to move toward more interpretative or critical stances with respect to their reading of text. Thus, teachers play a significant role in guiding students toward higher level discussions as they engage in modeling behavior, providing frameworks for approaching texts, and posing interpretive questions.

DISCUSSION IS INFLUENCED BY THE CULTURAL BACKGROUND OF THE PARTICIPANTS. Although few studies have specifically addressed the influence of cultural background on discussion, numerous anthropological studies of classroom discourse suggest that students of minority cultures often find themselves struggling to make sense of interaction patterns that occur in the classroom context (White, 1990). This is of paramount concern because many of our minority students (black, Latino, Native American, and Hawaiian) have low reading achievement scores (National Center for Education Statistics, 1988, 1992). Students of all cultures come to the classroom with considerable language strengths; however, unless these strengths are recognized and acknowledged, students may have difficulty engaging in classroom learning.

Heath's (1983) study of children from a southeastern U.S. town revealed that questions were used differently by young black students and their teachers. The children did not respond to "known answer" questions. They would lapse into silence or contribute minimal information when teachers asked direct factual questions. However, when the questions asked of the children were more authentic and representative of the kinds of questions posed to them in their home and community environment, these children responded actively and aggressively, offering useful information about their past experiences. Heath concluded that an awareness and use of the kinds of language that children use in the home and community can foster interaction and discussion in the school setting.

According to Delpit (1990) "one of the most difficult tasks we face as human beings is communicating meaning across our individual differences, a task confounded immeasurably when we attempt to communicate across social lines, racial lines, cultural lines or lines of unequal power" (p. 263). Anthropological analyses of cultural differences during discussion can lead to the identification of students' language strengths and ways to engage all students in successful classroom discussions (White, 1990).

CONCLUSIONS

Clearly, discussion can make an important and unique contribution to helping children learn from text. The research on small group discussion in elementary classrooms supports the notion that such interaction engages students in the co-construction of knowledge, advances student learning, and provides opportunities for students to learn important interpersonal skills while conversing, interpreting, and negotiating in active and constructive ways. There is no one method or approach for implementing the ideal discussion; instead, research suggests that teachers have important choices to make. Future research is needed to illuminate how text type, group size, leadership, and group composition affect discussion. Yet ultimately, the creation of effective, small group discussions within the classroom context is a process of experimentation and refinement in order to find the most appropriate approach to fit students' needs.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

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CHAPTER 3

Discussion in Multilingual, Multicultural Classrooms

Alfredo Schifini

This chapter focuses on promoting discussion in multilingual and multicultural settings. The presentation of instructional strategies that promote language development for English learners is framed in the broader context of providing a comprehensive program for second language speakers of English. The goals of this chapter are: (a) to increase understanding among educators as to the myriad of factors that influence the first and second language development of English learners; (b) to provide insight into implications of recent research in language development and bilingualism; and (c) to suggest teaching strategies that foster discussion and conceptual development.

Educators in the United States have become increasingly aware of the challenge of providing effective instruction for students whose first language is not English. Although total school enrollment has declined slightly between 1976 and 1988, minority enrollment increased by roughly 25% over the same period. By the end of the century, minority students will comprise roughly 40% of the total student population. Particularly startling have been the growth rates of Hispanic and Asian students. In the decade of the 1980's Hispanic student enrollment increased by 48%. During the same period Asians and Pacific Islanders increased by 84%. Nationwide, the non-English speaking student population has increased 76% in the past decade. Although 75% of the students new to English live in five states: California, New York, Florida, Texas and Illinois, over 40% of the nation's school districts have limited or non-English speakers. In the 1970s, churches and other local agencies began assisting displaced refugees. As a result, school districts that traditionally hosted generations of native speakers of English now serve children that speak many languages. Among these native tongues are some never before found in our schools (National Center for Education Statistics, 1993). By the year 2050 the Latino population will have tripled in number and the Asian population will have increased ten times (National Center for Education Statistics, 1993; Kellogg, 1988).

> ***"School districts that traditionally hosted generations of native speakers of English now serve children that speak many languages."***

Educational programs for second language learners have focused on the development of native-like proficiency in English and academic inclusion. Consensus regarding these aims is almost unanimous. The complexity of issues surrounding students acquiring English as a second language (ESL), coupled with a wide range of linguistic and cultural factors, make one simple solution impossible. Labels such as "immigrant," "bilingual," and "ESL students," although well intended, do not really reveal much about students acquiring English. Traditionally, ESL has been used to refer to the teaching of English to the speakers of other languages. The ESL program may be a component of a comprehensive instructional program that uses the child's native language to provide access to grade level subject matter. Limited English Proficient (LEP) has been widely used for students who are learning in their second language.

The label "ESL students" does highlight the common need to learn English, but places emphasis on English acquisition, rather than learning other subject matter. Instead, "second language learners" or "students acquiring English" appear to be more appropriate.

Regardless of the terminology, students vary greatly. Although all children learn how to talk, and therefore have some sense of how language works, cultural differences can greatly influence language development. For example, discourse rules regarding who may talk, when, and for how long may vary across cultures (Philips, 1983, 1970). Differences in pace, pitch, and volume may be perceived to have totally different effects. Unfamiliar roles, expectations, and varying language input also complicate matters (Krashen, 1985). Dunn (1991) suggests that learning styles may be culturally determined. In analyzing learning style traits, it appears that some cultural groups prefer working alone, while other students from differing cultures express a preference for group work. Dunn also noted wide discrepancies among subpopulations in the United States and the general population. Others have pointed out that students tend to do better when the teaching approach matches the learning preferences (Hatch, 1983; Kolb, 1984).

The main aspect of diversity for students acquiring English is language. Second language learners vary greatly with regard to level of prior schooling, literacy in the home language, and previous exposure to English. Students also differ in terms of family background variables such as socioeconomic status, conditions under which they emigrated, contact with the home country, and parental expectations. Affective variables with regard to the acquisition of English, acculturation, and assimilation also play a role. Students carry social, cultural, and affective predispositions. For example, pedagogy that stresses rote memorization of facts, a practice common in schools around the world, may cause uncertainties associated with inductive approaches.

In some cases a variety of factors may coexist. For example, older students with limited schooling may be learning abstract concepts, acquiring English, and developing literacy for the first time. Additionally, these students may have varying personal and group experiences in the home and community that will play a role in concept attainment and literacy development. Heath (1983) points out that youngsters coming from print-oriented societies acquire a sense of literacy because print and speech convey meaning at an early age. Children who rarely observe anyone reading or writing, even though they are reared in print-rich societies, tend to view themselves as less able readers (Hudelson, 1989).

It is helpful for teachers to obtain as much information about the diverse student populations they serve as possible. It is important, however, that students' background profiles do not turn into a negative self-fulfilling prophecy. Ascribed variables and background factors that students can not control should not be used to channel some second language learners into situations that do not enable them to develop their full potential (Ogbu & Matute-Bianchi, 1986). Language and cultural diversity must become positive conditions in our schools if we wish to provide experiences that build on students' strengths and uniqueness.

THE ROLE OF THE STUDENTS' PRIMARY LANGUAGE IN PROMOTING DISCUSSION

Another aspect of diversity is the student range of language abilities in the home language. Researchers strongly maintain that students who speak, read, and write well in their primary or home language have a greater propensity for academic success in English (Collier, 1987; Cummins, 1989; Krashen & Biber, 1988). The key factor in educational programs that provide language and subject matter in the home language is that children are able to keep up academically while learning English. Reading instruction and the presentation of cognitively demanding academic material in the students' primary language can ultimately facilitate academic performance in English (Cummins, 1991). When children have a broad command of the first language, they tend to acquire English and rapidly achieve a native-like proficiency (Edelsky, 1986; Edelsky, Altwerger & Flores, 1991; Hakuta, 1986; Krashen, 1985). Programs that enable students to fully develop their native language, acquire initial literacy in their primary language, or expand on the literacy development they had already begun in their home country are effective (Krashen & Biber, 1988). Students who have developed strong linguistic knowledge in their home language bring a broader range of skills and metalinguistic awareness to the task of acquiring English. Development of the primary language sends an affirming

> *“Students who have developed strong linguistic knowledge in their home language bring a broader range of skills and metalinguistic awareness to the task of acquiring English.”*

message regarding the child’s prior knowledge. In many settings, particularly when large numbers of students speak the same home language, it is feasible to continue native language development and primary language literacy. In other settings this is not possible. English learners may be found in small numbers or may represent many language groups. Staff limitations or other constraints may exist. It is still advisable for peer or cross age tutors, community volunteers, teaching assistants, or other models to continue using the native language as a vehicle for discussion. Heath (1989) points out that academic success does not rest on the specific language students know, but on ways of using language they know. This is particularly crucial when youngsters are very new to English, because the native language is the only vehicle by which they may express abstract thought and demonstrate higher level thinking. Mother tongue is the vehicle for establishing a personal identity (Ferdman, 1991; Skutnabb-Kangas, 1981). It enables children to organize their thinking.

Although activities that promote discussion in the native language will vary greatly depending upon the school and community context, teachers should keep in mind the following:

- Utilize parents, older students, and community resources to ensure that the students’ native language, personal background, and culture are valued and incorporated into the school experience.
- Provide quality literature where possible. Recent technology such as CD-ROM and other software can provide an additional resource, particularly when children speak lesser known languages.
- Whenever possible, classroom and school libraries should reflect the students’ native language.
- Focus on academic language development in the home language.
- When book talks take place, try to lead the students toward more divergent responses that reflect interpretation and evaluation of the piece.
- Attempt to support conceptual growth by allowing students to solve problems, negotiate, synthesize, and compare in their native language while grappling with new abstract material.
- Allow for individual differences in native language development. Some students will rely on their native language more than others.

LANGUAGE ACQUISITON AND LANGUAGE TEACHING

Over the past 25 years there has been a shift in the way second languages have been taught. In previous years the emphasis was placed on specific aspects of the target language, English. In sharp contrast, more recently the language system has been taught indirectly through use. Learners are focused on using the language and comprehending messages, as opposed to the study of the language itself. Several research efforts have contributed to the paradigm shift.

Many will recall the audiolingual approach that was popular in the 1960s. Classes developed skills through habit and drill. Behaviorists and other structuralists supported language theory rooted in behavioral psychology, but the lack of functional language proficiency in students taught with such stimulus response methods enabled sociolinguistic and psycholinguistic theories to emerge.

One theory to emerge was that of Krashen (1985) who maintains that language is unconsciously acquired in the initial stages of second language development without formal instruction. Learners acquire the new language by comprehending natural language input that is slightly above their actual level of competency. Competency is built incrementally by understanding messages and using the new language for real communication. Errors are viewed as predictable and are thought to gradually remediate over time as more comprehensible input is processed.

Other researchers have criticized the theories on the grounds that input by itself, although important for second language acquisition to take place, is not enough to develop native like proficiency. This is evident particularly with regard to grammatical accuracy (Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991; Swain, 1985).

It appears that a balance of language input from a variety of sources gives students a base to begin using the new language. Language output or production lets new learners test new hypotheses about the rules and grammar of the new system. Many theorists agree that activities in the classroom should involve real communication and that language should be used to carry out relevant, interesting, purposeful tasks. Much of the sociolinguistic research has maintained that students can start communicating by using very little amounts of language to negotiate meaning. Clearly, when students are merely beginners in English, rich native language resources and support facilitates the language gap.

> **“*Activities in the classroom should involve real communication and language should be used to carry out relevant, interesting, purposeful tasks.*”**

IMPLICATION OF LANGUAGE ACQUISITION THEORY FOR TEACHERS

Teachers who are attempting to promote discussion in the students' second language should keep the following in mind:

- There are differences and similarities between the first and second language. Academic language and literacy in English is tied to the level of native language development the learner has attained. There can only be one native language.
- Self-confidence, motivation, and anxiety affect language acquisition. Avoid pressure to perform. Remember that comprehension exceeds language production. Combine verbal and nonverbal input and describe activities as you demonstrate them.

All teachers can do the following:

- Use sensitive strategies for correcting errors by celebrating approximations and modeling correct responses. Keep in mind that grammatical/phonological errors are normal at all stages of language acquisition.
- Encourage students to use the new language even if imperfect. Activities should promote social interaction. Vygotsky (1978) and Wells (1986) have pointed out the importance of social interaction for academic success. Listen carefully for clues that display language development (see chapters by Matanzo and Walker in this volume for additional ideas about assessing students' progress during discussions). When appropriate responses are given, provide positive reinforcement, but refrain from emphasizing grammatical or syntactic correctness during the early stages of acquisition. Remember that language competency evolves over time.
- Integrate language and content instruction. English can be acquired simultaneously with subject matter by attending to the comprehensibility of classroom input. Build academic language skills by teaching students indirectly through content lessons. Recent research (Rigg & Enright, 1986) has indicated that lessons should include the four modes of language: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Additionally, lessons should focus on understanding key concepts rather than memorizing isolated facts and details.

RETHINKING CLASSROOM APPROACHES

Engaging students in varied social contexts for the purpose of fostering real communication in oral and written form is a key element in the language development of all students. Many researchers agree that processes in language and literacy development are similar for both native language speakers and second language learners (Hudelson, 1989;

Urzua, 1989). There are, however, major differences between reading in the home language and English as a second language. One fundamental distinction is that second language learners are attempting to develop reading skills at the same time as oral fluency. In order to effectively meet the needs of diverse student populations of English language learners, teachers must rethink existing procedures. They must develop and employ a broader repertoire of instructional approaches. No one set of instructional approaches will meet the needs of all second language learners, but teachers may begin by revisiting existing successful practices.

SELECTING TEXTS FOR USE IN DISCUSSIONS

Children's literature provides a rich source of language input for second language learners who are at varying levels of English proficiency. Literature that is read to students acquiring English must be carefully selected. For example, at the beginning stages of English acquisition, students' books should reflect either universal experiences or those experiences common to newcomers. Youngsters will soon find new labels for familiar experiences. Books for those new to English should have clear visuals that can be used for engaging students in discourse. The visuals also form the basis of the linkage between prior knowledge and new labels. Care should be taken to choose books that do not require culturally specific knowledge that is limited to the United States or Western Europe. Even visuals that reflect regional architecture, such as high rise buildings or adobe structures, may cause difficulty at this stage. Lastly, the story line found in books for beginners needs to be focused on one or two objects, concepts, or ideas. In such cases the print-to-text correspondence should be tight and the language should be literal in nature.

Books that convey the message exclusively through illustrations are also extremely helpful to invite-talk among those new to English. There are many benefits of wordless books at the early stages of language development: (a) second language learners who may be later arrivals with limited schooling in the home country are able to relate to books even if they are preliterate; (b) discussion is framed in meaningful contexts; (c) the illustrations ensure that chunks of language and the global meaning is conveyed; (d) the teacher can adjust the language used in presenting the book; (e) repetition and restatements provide an additional source of language input; (f) students use the illustrations found in wordless books not only to gain meaning, but to expand their knowledge. Thus, valuable strategies that proficient readers employ are modeled for learners who are in the initial stages of English language acquisition.

> ***"What students are attempting to say is more important than how they are saying it."***

MORE PROFICIENT STUDENTS

Similar care must be exercised in presenting books that invite discussion through read-alouds with more proficient second language learners. Even those youngsters who are not necessarily new to English will be more successful when books are predictable in nature. The predictability of a text depends on several factors, such as familiarity of the content, language patterns, and visual support. Figurative language such as made-up words or idiomatic speech may be problematic at this stage of English development. As students' language proficiency develops, teachers tend to group students more in whole class configurations for the read-aloud experience. While this does provide an opportunity for interaction and modeling by more proficient peers, periodic use of smaller group settings may foster response to literature and more discussion. When the whole class grouping is used, it is imperative that teachers and classmates accept and value student responses. For those youngsters attempting to respond to literature, what they are attempting to say is more important than how they are saying it. In order to become proficient readers, second language learners, as all students, must talk in meaningful ways about what the text says to them.

Another appropriate source of academic language input and discussion for those students who have already acquired some English is informational text. Although content material is most appropriate for these youngsters, highly motivational concept books can be read to children even at the beginning stages. These texts provide a meaningful context for initial exposure to the academic language demands students will eventually be confronting in expository text. At all levels, children can react to text by sequencing, comparing and describing. As English proficiency increases, more abstract concepts and ideas can be presented. Reading aloud sections of content texts and supporting the presentation with visuals, props, and audio-visual material can increase comprehension of key concepts. Discussion at the more advanced levels might include a variety of divergent responses, such as debating, simulating, or synthesizing (see chapters in this volume by Guthrie & McCann; Hartman & Allison; Leal; and Mazzoni & Gambrell for other ideas that might be adapted for students acquiring English for discussing informational text).

> *“Reading aloud sections of content texts and supporting the presentation with visuals, props, and audio-visual material can increase comprehension of key concepts.”*

OTHER OPPORTUNITIES FOR DISCUSSION

All types of print resources may be utilized to stimulate discussion and build academic language. Theme cycles, as opposed to teacher directed thematic units, can foster a positive self-image and provide a social context for language and literacy development. Students at varying levels of language proficiency collaboratively plan what is to be studied, choosing the topic for study, highlighting common knowledge, suggesting issues for investigation, planning learning opportunities, and ultimately sharing new knowledge. By exploring issues in greater depth, children raise questions, share ideas, and use authentic texts to satisfy their curiosities (Altwerger & Flores, 1991).

Similarly, the Language Experience Approach (LEA) affords students an opportunity to discuss, share, and negotiate language and ideas with their peers. By dictating stories to the teacher or scribe, children are not required to read text outside of their experiential base. Rigg and Enright (1989) and others have reported great success with LEA for second language learners including older students. Although LEA was developed as an alternative to basal reading for native speakers, its use with second language learners is clear. Students move from reading their own words to reading those of others. It is highly motivating to create a library containing student authored books which have been produced through LEA and reflect a wide range of language and experiences.

Lastly, the classroom and school environment can play a role in fostering discussion among second language learners. Students and parents should be encouraged to bring to class real objects that reflect life in the home country. The presentations serve as a wonderful springboard for discussion as well as possible language experience stories. Print and books in the environment should reflect student work at all levels of language proficiency.

When linguistic and cultural diversity is affirmed in classrooms, language flows naturally, literacy flourishes, and the entire society reaps the benefits.

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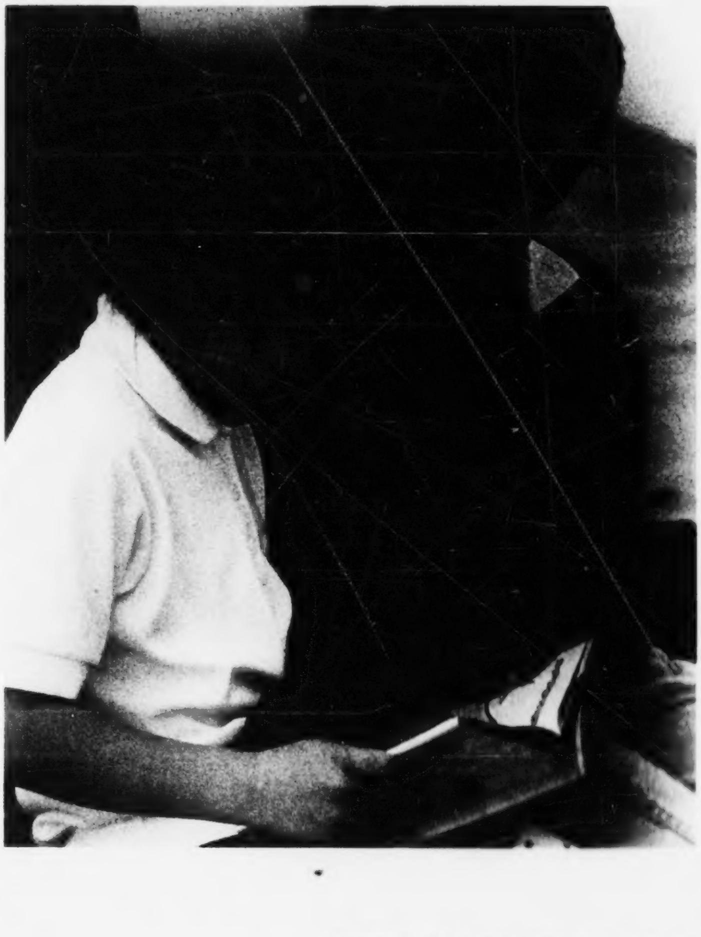
PART II
DISCUSSION IN ACTION



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CHAPTER 4

Storytime Plus Dialogue Equals Interactive Read-Alouds

Shelby J. Barrentine

Dialogue is securing its rightful place as an essential tool for learning in almost every facet of the school day. The work of Vygotsky (1978) suggests that learning results from verbal interaction with peers and adults. Internal processes are "roused to life" when children interact with others (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988). In this chapter, a first grade classroom is presented where the teacher uses dialogue to engage her students in high-interest, language rich story books. We will explore the way that this teacher's use of dialogue with her first grade students elicits interactive read-alouds of high-interest books during storytime.

WHAT ARE INTERACTIVE READ-ALOUDS?

In contrast to traditional storytime read-aloud practices, dialogue encourages interaction between teachers and students and unilaterally between students. As a result, children explore the meaning of stories in a highly social manner. Rather than reading the entire story without class feedback, the teacher reads the story interactively. Before and during reading, the teacher elicits predictions, poses questions, and utilizes illustrations. Students respond to the teacher's invitations for discussion and also offer spontaneous comments during the read-aloud session. After reading, the teacher helps the children to pull together loose ends that remain from the reading discoveries.

WHY USE INTERACTIVE READ-ALOUDS?

Discussion and dialogue have recently gained recognition as the basis for meaningful learning in literature-based classrooms (Peterson & Eeds, 1990; Roser & Martinez, 1995; Short & Pierce, 1990). Children do not necessarily view themselves as meaning makers with well developed discourse skills when they begin their schooling. According to Peterson and Eeds (1990), "children learn to make meaning from texts by practicing this action alongside makers of meaning who are more experienced than they are" (p. 18). This view reflects the Vygotskian notion that all learning is social (Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1985) and that the critical role of the teacher is to provide task assistance in an appropriate social setting (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988). Tharp and Gallimore explain that teachers must learn to use dialogue to assist learners in accomplishing tasks that they could not complete without verbal assistance.

> ***"The reading conversations help children construct meanings that go beyond what they could construct alone or without verbal interaction."***

The interactive read-aloud is an instructional practice that uses dialogue to assist and enable novices in the meaning-making process. The reading conversations help children construct meanings that go beyond what they could construct alone or without verbal interaction. As talk occurs, the community of listeners builds a shared meaning for each story. This does not mean that children are denied the opportunity to try their own interpretations, but instead they have the opportunity to benefit from the insight of others (Peterson & Eeds, 1990). In addition to assisting meaning construction and developing shared meanings, interactive read-alouds can:

- promote intimate familiarity with a story
- enhance enjoyment of stories
- allow for positive social interaction
- provide rehearsal of comprehension strategies.

With teacher assistance, children construct shared meanings and grow very familiar with each story. This interactive reading with a knowledgeable teacher builds familiarity with rich literature similar to the way hiking a nature trail with an experienced trail guide encourages awareness. There is a sense of mutual discovery, but the guide will not allow you to miss the most unique and interesting sightings that the trail has to offer. The experience is positive and rewarding because shared discovery is inclusive of all participants and because the assistance begins to equip participants with the abilities required to make independent discoveries.

Of course, not every read-aloud event should be interactive. Teachers implement various read-aloud practices appropriate for different books and instructional goals. From shared readings that focus on reading for meaning and intimacy with print

(Holdaway, 1979) to straight-through readings that focus purely on reading for pleasure, read-alouds are essential to children's balanced reading development. The practice of using dialogue to promote interactive read-alouds is especially helpful and appropriate when used with stories that are moderately advanced but will soon become a part of many of the children's independent reading repertoire, or when the chosen story is particularly challenging.

SETTING THE STAGE

Each day, first graders in Mrs. Jan Herbert's class in Bakersfield, California, USA became deeply involved in the stories they read interactively. To understand the dialogue and what happens during storytime, I studied transcripts of four interactive read-aloud events. The dialogue that follows is drawn from a read-aloud event in which Herbert reads *Blueberries for Sal* (McCloskey, 1948). In this classic picture storybook, a human mother and daughter and a bear mother and cub go to pick berries on Blueberry Hill. Sal becomes separated from her mother and she meets and follows mother bear. In parallel fashion, the cub separates from her mother and follows Sal's mother. Eventually, youngsters and parents reunite and they leave Blueberry Hill with berries in their pails.

A SHARED BEGINNING

The teacher gathers the children to sit comfortably on the carpet and encourages them to find a position in which they can view the illustrations. She builds background by reminding them that over the past few days, they have been talking, reading, and writing about bears. Next, she explains that the new story is also about bears and is titled *Blueberries for Sal*. As she prepares students to listen to the story, the teacher displays the illustrated endpaper and encourages them to identify the two main human characters, invites them to make predictions about the setting, and mentions the name of the author/illustrator.

Teacher: Let's preview the pictures here. Who do you think this might be? (She displays the endpaper and points to the mother who is in her kitchen pouring blueberries into a canning jar.)

Adam: They're gonna make berry pie!

Heidi: The mama.

Teacher: And who might this be?

Mike: The—the—Sal!

Teacher: Very good. Do you think that they live in the city or the country?

Class: (overlapping comments) Country. City. They might be both.

Teacher: Country? What makes you think they live in the country?

Sarah: 'Cause there's a lot of trees.

Teacher: A lot of trees. Okay. Do you see any big, tall buildings and skyscrapers like we've talked about in our social studies book?

Class: (together) No.

Adam: They live in the country.

Sarah: They live in the forest.

Teacher: Here's the title page. *Blueberries for Sal.* This is by Robert McCloskey. He's written some other stories that we have read. Raise your hand if you've heard *Make Way for Ducklings.* He's written a whole bunch of stories.

The kitchen window in the illustration looks out over a rural scene and the teacher demonstrates to the students that they can use the illustrations to make predictions about the story. The overlapping comments indicate that looking at the window scene does not establish the setting for some students. Mrs. Herbert focuses on the "country" response and has a student justify that response. Further, she activates their common background knowledge gained from their social studies lessons to help them confirm that the story will take place in the country rather than in the city. These interactions establish a shared beginning to the story and involve the students in the read-aloud.

DURING READING

PROVIDING INFORMATION. The teacher turns to the first page of the story and reads it aloud. On this page Mother tells Sal that they will pick berries for canning. The canning concept is central to the story because later, Mother and Little Bear come to eat blueberries because they "must store up food for the long, cold winter" (p. 18). Likely, the first graders have limited or no knowledge about preserving food. Thus, before turning the page, the teacher briefly dialogues with the students about canning food. One student states that his mother picks fruit and another student comments that his mom freezes food in bags. Mrs. Herbert decides to share a bit more background on the concept of canning. She confirms a student comment and then explains the concept, using the endpaper illustration to support the explanation.

Teacher: In a bag. Okay. That's one way that we can store fruits and vegetables. Another way is by putting them in special glass jars. If you look on the very first page there are some glass jars that they're pouring the berries in and then they seal the top of them very tightly. Sometimes there's a plastic lid and then a metal lid that goes on top. It keeps it very fresh so that the air can't get inside the jar, and it preserves the fruits and vegetables so that you can keep them for a long time in your cupboard. You can eat them a month or two later—not just the next day.

UNDERSTANDING CHARACTERS. Early in the read-aloud, the teacher directs students to notice important particulars about the story. For example, in the following dialogue segment she asks the students to think about the main character and to specifically interpret Sal's feelings.

Teacher: (Reading pages 8 & 9) Little Sal picked three berries and dropped them in her little tin pail...kuplink, kuplank, kuplunk! She picked three more berries and ate them. Then she picked more berries and dropped one in the pail—kuplunk! And the rest she ate. Then Little Sal ate all four blueberries out of her pail!

Teacher: How do you think Sal's feeling right now? Carley?

Carley: Happy.

Teacher: You think she's feeling happy?

Carley: Because there is a smile on her face.

Teacher: Do you think she likes blueberries?

Class: (together) Yes!

Teacher: What makes you think she likes blueberries?

Allison: Because she's eating them right away.

Teacher: She's popping them right into her mouth, isn't she?

Through dialogue, an informed perspective on the main character Sal is constructed in the social setting. Students hear about one another's ideas and those who had not reflected on Sal's mood now have an opportunity to do so. The teacher has helped put all the students in touch with Sal's feelings, and they are able to monitor her changing feelings throughout the story. For example, they notice later that Sal is still happy because she does not realize she is separated from her mother. When Sal does realize she is separated, interactions reveal the students' inferences that, "now, she is sad."

FIGURING OUT THE STORY. Dialogue can be used to assist students' thinking. During interactive read-alouds, teachers can be alert to opportunities for helping students piece together the "larger picture." In this reading event, the teacher initiates a dialogue in which the group creates a comparison between Sal and Little Bear. Collectively, they construct a sophisticated understanding of the parallels between the two characters. Notice that in the example below the teacher encourages the students to construct a comparison. The statement, "They are both brown," is accepted even though there is no indication in the story or illustrations that Sal's skin color is brown. Note, too, that the teacher does not clarify when there is lack of agreement among the students about whether or not both Sal and Little Bear are "girls."

Teacher: (Reading pages 18 and 19) On the other side of Blueberry Hill, Little Bear came with his mother to eat blueberries. "Little Bear," she said, "eat lots of berries and grow big and fat. We must store up food for the long, cold winter."

Teacher: Can you think of a way that Little Sal and Little Bear are alike? Bart?

Bart: They're both little.

Teacher: They're both little. Yes, they are. Matt, what do you think?

Matt: They're both brown.

Teacher: Okay. Um, somebody in the back—Ben. Do you want to look at the picture, Ben? Here's Little Sal, and here's Little Bear.

Ben: They're both girls.

Teacher: Okay. Maybe so.

Allison: Uh, uh! It says *his* mother (referring to the text on pages 18 & 19).

Teacher: Bart.

Bart: They both like blueberries.

Teacher: Those are all great ideas. Let's read on.

Lacey: I had one! They are both kids.

Teacher: They are both kids? Okay. These are great ideas.

Teacher: (Reading page 20) Little Bear followed behind his mother as she walked slowly through the bushes eating berries. Little Bear stopped now and then to eat berries.

(Jessica has her hand raised.)

Teacher: Jessica?

Jessica: They are both stopping to pick berries.

Teacher: Yes, they are.

Teacher: (Reading page 21) Then he had to hustle along to catch up!

Bart: That's what the little girl did!

Teacher: Yes. Good, Bart!

Teacher: (Reading page 22) Because his feet were tired of hustling, he picked out a large clump of bushes and sat down right in the middle and ate——

Class: (together) Blueberries!

Bart: It's the same again!

Class: (overlapping comments) They're doing the same thing. They're doing the same thing!

The students are riveted to the text as the teacher reads the next episode in which the mothers discover they are being followed by the wrong youngsters. Then, a student concludes:

Ben: There's a pattern.

Teacher: What pattern do you see?

Ben: (Pausing for several seconds before stating idea) The bear and the mom do the same thing.

Teacher: The bear mom and Sal's mom do the same thing. Yes. Good for you, Ben. There are a lot of good patterns in this story.

The teacher's well placed question of how Sal and Little Bear are alike helps students unlock the parallel nature of this story. As a result, the students are able to appreciate and recognize more parallel events as the story unfolds. Notice that the children take over and initiate the comments once they grasp the parallel story structure. Ben carried his observation of the parallel pattern beyond the similarities between Sal and Little Bear. He observed that the mothers also "do the same thing."

Using structure to make sense of a story is an important reading comprehension strategy. In a reconceptualization of teaching reading comprehension, Dole, Duffy, Roehler, and Pearson (1991) state that expert readers use strategies to "foster, monitor, regulate, and maintain comprehension" (p. 242). Among the key recommendations for strategic reading comprehension, they discuss the importance of providing novice readers with opportunities to gain facility with using story structure. This interactive read-aloud event is an opportunity for the children to rehearse this important strategy and apply it alongside their teacher.

A FULL CIRCLE

Now, almost at the end of the story, it is clear the children grasp the parallel nature of the story. To bring closure to other aspects of the story, the teacher weaves together threads from dialogue that occurred near the beginning of the read-aloud. She returns students' attention to feelings and to the topic of canning—storing up food for winter. Notice that at least one student is still alert to ambiguities about the genders of the characters. Then, briefly acknowledging the pleasure derived from the story, she concludes the read-aloud event.

Teacher: (Reading page 52) Little Bear's mother had not hunted very long before she heard a hustling sound that stopped now and then to munch and to swallow. She knew just what made that noise.

Teacher: What made that noise?

Class: (together) Little Bear.

Teacher: How do you think Little Bear's mom feels right now?

Class: (together) Happy.

Teacher: How do you think Little Bear feels?

Class: (overlapping comments) Happy. Surprised.

Teacher: Surprised? Why is she surprised, Zach?

Zach: Because she finally found her mother.

Heidi: He.

Teacher: (Reading page 54) Little Bear and his mother went home down one side of Blueberry Hill eating blueberries all the way and full of food stored up for next winter. Little Sal and her mother went down the other side of Blueberry Hill picking blueberries all the way and drove home with food to can for next winter. A whole pail of blueberries and three more besides.

Teacher: (Pauses as she displays the back endpaper that shows the mother pouring blueberries into a canning jar) Do you think they have lots of food for winter? Lots of berries to make pies?

Class: Yes!

Teacher: What do you think about that story? Do you like it?

Class: Yes!

Teacher: Yes, it was a fun story. I enjoyed it very much.

Throughout the read-aloud event, the teacher has used dialogue to help students develop a systematic rather than idiosyncratic understanding of the story. Through making predictions, they have discovered the parallel nature of the story and have used the text structure for ongoing comprehension of the story. The dialogue has created a context for rehearsing a key reading comprehension strategy. Furthermore, students have become very familiar with the story. Familiarity is an important step towards becoming confident at this level with retelling, pretend reading, or conventionally reading a story (Brown & Cambourne, 1990; Schwartz, 1988). Overall, by sharing ideas through ongoing dialogue, they have socially constructed a complex, shared understanding of the story.

PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

Using dialogue to promote interactive read-aloud events is more challenging than it may first appear. Some planning considerations may be helpful to achieve read-alouds that are surrounded by natural talk that contributes to the meaning-making process.

CHOOSING BOOKS

It is particularly important to base interactive read-alouds on literature that entices children to respond with pleasure and with understanding (Lukens, 1990). Overly familiar, very simple, or very complex stories are unlikely to generate interactions that enhance story enjoyment. Choose absorbing literature with rich language, lively or meaningful plots, winning characters, and engaging illustrations for interactive read-alouds. Choose books that are known as high-interest stories—ones you love and ones you anticipate your students will love.

REFLECTIVE PLANNING

Interactive read-alouds may appear to be easy and natural at first glance, but they are really a byproduct of thoughtful, reflective planning. Suggestions for preparing interactive read-alouds include the following:

- Read the book several times before reading it to your students. Reread the book to uncover its complexities and themes, to identify the contributions of the illustrations, and to get in touch with the literary and artistic nature of the book.
- Consider which meaning-making strategies can be called upon to help students participate in the meaning making process. Look to the text, its illustrations, and the students to determine what strategies to draw upon (for example, text structure, summarizing, personal connections, story or character comparisons). Then, craft during-reading questions and comments based on these strategies.
- Anticipate interaction points. For example, note where students' meaning construction may benefit from additional background knowledge, sharing personal connections, making and confirming predictions, examining a character's feelings, or reviewing a story episode. Identify points at which children, unassisted, might miss the unique and meaningful discoveries the story has to offer.

> ***"Choose absorbing literature with rich language, lively or meaningful plots, winning characters, and engaging illustrations for interactive read-alouds."***

- In advance of the read-aloud, think about how to phrase questions and comments to promote story interaction. Surprisingly, even after completing the above preparation, it may be challenging to articulate well phrased questions when first implementing interactive readings. Writing open-ended questions can be a practical way to review questioning skills.

INCONSPICUOUS FACTORS. Successful interactive read-alouds depend on other factors that are not readily apparent: flexibility, good judgment, and time. After reflective preparation, it is essential to remain flexible and not overly control the read-aloud event. Allow student responses to stories to lead the interactions. Be prepared to follow the children's lead. Use good judgment about balancing the amount of talk and text. Avoid excessive teacher talk. At the same time, take advantage of opportunities for mutual discovery of the story. Finally, allow adequate time to implement interactive storybook readings. Reading a story interactively will approximately double the amount of time it takes to read a story straight through.

> ***"It is essential to remain flexible and not overly control the read aloud event. Allow student responses to stories to lead the interactions."***

CONCLUSION

The rhythm of each interactive read-aloud is determined by the key players: the teacher, students, and story. The details of each read-aloud event will differ and the amount and focus of the dialogue will certainly change. What remains constant is the teacher's uses of dialogue to foster meaning making in a highly social setting. The ultimate goal of interactive read-alouds is to help children enjoy and understand stories through meaningful dialogue.

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CHAPTER 5

"But Bonsai Trees Don't Grow in Baskets": Young Children's Talk During Authentic Inquiries

David Wray and Maureen Lewis

Amy, Kelly, Barry, Lisa, Simon, Lorraine, and Charlotte belong to a class of six-year-olds in a school in the Southwest of England. They work in a pleasant, open classroom which borders on a central school courtyard. The class is responsible for the upkeep of the flower beds in the courtyard and some of the children attend a weekly after-school gardening club run by parent helpers. It is June and the school has decided to pay for hanging baskets containing plants to liven up the courtyard. The children are anxious to discuss the contents of these baskets, so their teacher, Mrs. Caroline Cox, decides to get them involved in selecting the appropriate plants for the baskets. Later the class will visit the local garden center to purchase their chosen plants; however the children learn from a discussion with their teacher that only certain plants will be suitable and they will have to do some research before making their choices.

As part of the Exeter Extending Literacy (EXEL) project at the University of Exeter we followed the research of these children as they:

- set clear purposes for their work,
- drew up a framework for recording information,
- located information in a range of reference materials,
- collaboratively constructed their understanding of the information they located,
- made their recommendations for the purchase of plants,
- were empowered by the knowledge they had constructed.

In this chapter we will give an account of the work of this class as they engaged in this authentic inquiry. It focuses particularly on types of collaborative talk that marked their interaction and the ways in which their collaborative talk contributed to their learning during the inquiry. First, we will present background to the aims of the EXEL project.

THE EXEL PROJECT

The EXEL project is a curriculum development project that has involved us in work with teacher groups throughout the United Kingdom looking closely at children's interactions with text, especially nonfiction text (for further details of the project, see Lewis, Wray, & Rospigliosi, 1994; Wray & Lewis, 1994). We were concerned that nonfiction text had been relatively neglected as a resource for learning, so we agreed that a program seeking to extend literacy should pay adequate attention to this. As part of our project we have been developing a process model to describe children's interactions with nonfiction texts (Wray & Lewis, 1995) while testing a range of strategies and materials for use in the classroom (Lewis, Wray, & Mitchell, 1995).

The model currently underpinning our work describes a process that is often labeled "research" in academic contexts. We see benefit in referring to children who engage in this process, no matter what their age, as researchers. The process of research consists fundamentally of establishing a question or series of questions and engaging in inquiries in order to find answers. An inquiry-based approach to curriculum encompasses just such a process.

STRUCTURING THE RESEARCH

The children in this class had a clear purpose to guide their research. Their teacher had guided them to make the focus for their research as explicit and structured as possible. Simply to ask them to find out about plants would have been too vague and vast a task. Since the children were relatively inexperienced researchers, the teacher suggested that a grid would help focus their research and provide a scaffold for the kind of questions they might want to ask. Through discussion, she was able to draw upon their prior knowledge of gardening, flowers, and hanging baskets. She wrote down their comments as they brainstormed what they already knew. Certain themes emerged that they drew together into several headings: height, spread, color, flowers and leaves, and smell. Together they constructed a grid that the children copied into their journals (see Figure 1).

Through this exercise the teacher was able to extend the students' technical vocabulary by substituting "fragrance" for "smell" and "foliage" for "leaves." Each heading of the grid acted both as a question to be answered and a key word to focus the children's research and, perhaps, to help with scanning the text for that particular word. By introducing these words at this stage, she was also preparing the students for the vocabulary they might encounter when they started to look in books. Because the information the children would need to locate within the books would be technical, it quickly became apparent that the reference books already available to the class were largely inadequate in terms of the level of detail they contained. The teacher was able to make available, with the help of the children themselves, several adult gardening books and pamphlets. Many children were so enthusiastic that they persuaded their parents to take them to local garden centers and stores to find reference materials, many of which they could pick up for no cost. Of course, these materials were designed for adult readers and their vocabulary, layout, and print size made few concessions for emergent readers.

> “ ***The process of research consists fundamentally of establishing a question or series of questions and engaging in inquiries in order to find answers.*** ”

We video-recorded several groups of children as they undertook their research. They worked in pairs (six children at a time) around a table loaded with gardening and flower books—most of them adult books. The teacher checked on the group at intervals, but most of the time the children worked independently. The video recorder was left running throughout the morning. During this time the students tended to whisper to each other and glance at the camera from time to time; however, the children eventually became oblivious to its presence. Field notes and observations were also made. We then reviewed the video and analyzed what took place.

Figure 1
The recording grid used by the children.

Topic: Flowers

Name of Flower	Color	Height	Fragrance	Trailing	Size of Foliage	Comments

As the children began their research, three distinct kinds of talk were observed in their interactions with one another. We shall refer to these as modeled talk, collaborative talk, and tangential talk. Each of these, in their own ways, functioned as enablers of the children's learning.

> *"Three distinct kinds of talk were observed in the interactions: modeled talk, collaborative talk, and tangential talk."*

MODELED TALK

Before they began their inquiries the teacher and the children discussed where they might find the needed information. The children suggested several sources: looking in books, asking experts (such as members of the gardening club), looking at other hanging baskets, asking their parents, and watching gardening programs on television. At this point, the teacher modeled how they might select and use information books. She did this by performing a think-aloud in which she talked about what she was doing and why. She was making what is usually an internal monologue accessible to the children. One excerpt from her demonstration follows:

Teacher: Now which of these books shall I use? This book's got flowers on the cover and the title tells me it might be useful. Now what do I do. Yes, I can look in the index. Let's look up hanging baskets in the index. So I'm going to turn to the back of the book. Here it is. Index. Now. It's arranged alphabetically a…d…g…h…h…here it is. H. Lets look for h, a….

Through this kind of metacognitive modeling (by making explicit to the children the thought processes she was going through as she was experiencing them) the teacher was able to give the children some important lessons on what an experienced reader does. The importance of teachers actually demonstrating the problem solving, planning, and strategic decision making that characterize the reading process cannot be overemphasized. Modeling enables teachers to make explicit the thought processes that accompany involvement in literate activities, processes which, by their very nature, are invisible.

During the ensuing discussions, there were many instances where the children used similar kinds of externalized thinking to guide their own work. Here, for example, are Amy and Kelly searching for information about nasturtiums:

Amy: This one got anything (picks up a book)?

Kelly: I need to copy (looks at the spelling of nasturtiums in Amy's jotter and writes).

Amy: Index. It should be here somewhere. Yes...right...what does it say? nasturtiums. It hasn't got it there. I'll have to go to the contents. Turn to the front. Ah, here it is (searches contents page—cannot find desired entry). It'll have to be another book (Scans pile of books).

Kelly: Look in that one (points to book).

Amy: Yeah. I'll look in this one (picks up book indicated by Kelly).

Kelly: (Holds front cover with Amy.) What's it say? (Reads) "Ornamental Kitchen Garden."

Amy: This is the one I had (browsing through some pages of pictures, but actively searching). This tells us about . . . hardy petunias . . . French marigolds...nasturtiums?...sweet Williams...Lizzie busies midsummer plants. (Reading page heading). "Marigolds," I've got some of those in my backyard (muttered conversation between the two—keep on 'browse searching').

Amy: Where's it gone? Nasturtium.

Kelly: Have a look in another book. (Amy and Kelly each pick up another book.)

Kelly: Have a look in the index.

Amy: Index. Right (both looking in index of their book).

Amy: Nasturtiums...Nasturtiums...Got it!...157...157...157...(turning pages and checking number). Here. Nasturtiums. Should be here somewhere—scanning page). There it is. Height 1 foot...30 cms. Well done. I found it. (Kelly begins to write. Amy closes book.)

Amy: I don't know the color yet do I ? (Color is the next column on grid. Reopens book.) 157...Right...What's the color?...What's the color? (Reads aloud). Red, orange, yellow; red, orange, yellow. We'd better get red (closes book again).

Kelly: How do you spell....? (Both write in color column.)

Amy: (Looking at grid) Right. Fragrance. What's its fragrance? Has it got a fragrance or has it not? I don't think...(opens book and searches for page 157 again). Now where's it gone?

The children are going through the process of searching for particular information but they are continually "talking themselves through" this process. It is notable that the language they use is very close to that which was previously modeled to them by their teacher. Amy's "Nasturtiums...It hasn't got it there. I'll have to go to the contents. Turn to the front. Ah, here it is," for example, might almost have come directly from the demonstration they received earlier from their teacher.

Kelly's role in this excerpt also seems to be derived from the talk she has witnessed her teacher using. She continually prompts Amy to carry out particular actions: "Look in that one," "Have a look in another book," "Have a look in the index." These are exactly the kinds of directions her teacher gave many times in the past. Both Amy and Kelly used talk to guide their actions and have learned to do this by listening to the talk their teacher used.

COLLABORATIVE TALK

The social, interactive nature of the task was important. On numerous occasions the children prompted each other to continue working, tried other techniques if they could not find what they were looking for, discussed information, worked together to understand difficult text, and asked each other for help and advice. Here, for example, are Amy and Kelly again, this time searching for information about the plant known in England as busy Lizzie (its Latin name is impatiens).

Kelly: Let's look in the index. Where did it say Busy Lizzie? (Both looking)

Amy: Busy Lizzie. I'll look in another book. (Kelly continues scanning original index.)

Kelly: Oh why? So that's...48 (starts to turn to page 48 and notices a picture).

Kelly: Oh look. Mrs. Henry Cox. (Amy glances at picture.) Miss Cox is a flower. (Amy looks again and both laugh.)

Amy: Where? (Kelly points. Both laugh)

Kelly: There. It says Miss Henry Cox.

Amy: Yes...but we're not looking for that, are we? We're trying to look for Busy Lizzie.

Kelly: I've got Busy Lizzies.

Amy: I know.

Kelly: (Turning pages) 48...Busy Lizzie...page 48...way past that...page 48 (arrives, and scans it; Amy gets up and looks over Kelly's shoulder.)

Amy: I'll look for it (starts looking in another book). I'll look for it. Don't you worry, Kelly, I'm good at looking in books. Busy Lizzie...100 ...150...(finds page 150). That's where it is. Should be here somewhere. (Closes book when she fails to find it.) Right...I'll try...this one (Takes another book). Now what? (Turns to index, scanning)...83. (Turns to page 83.) Busy Lizzie. (Finds and reads text aloud to herself.) That's not very much (Closes book). I hate this, I'm never going to find things. Right. Now what? I'm still...

Kelly: They're going to assembly. (Amy turns and looks.) They've got to, haven't they? (Amy doesn't respond. Both girls pick up book and again turn to index.)

Amy: Busy Lizzie...see...emperor...What?...Busy Lizzie...What? Busy Lizzie see emperor or something. What? Weird! (Kelly glances across.) See impoorer. What?...This, see. This one says Busy Lizzie see imp...emperor...or something.

Kelly: What are we looking for then?

Amy: Busy Lizzies. (Both look at Amy's book)

Kelly: That's strange. I'm telling Miss. (Both leave table.)

There is clear collaboration from both girls even though Amy takes the dominant role. This is a shared activity and the girls are co-constructing their own ways through the research. It is also interesting that they are able to share a harmless joke at the expense of their teacher when they discover a flower with the same name, but they soon bring themselves back to task.

The problem that bothered Amy near the end of this excerpt was discovering the entry, "Busy Lizzie, see Impatiens" in the index of her book. The girls eventually took this to their teacher who explained to them the conventions of cross-referencing and the use of Latin plant names. Amy and Kelly simply listened to this explanation and carried on with their work. This incident provides strong evidence of the power of authentic activities. It is unlikely that the teacher here would have planned to introduce six-year-olds to cross- referencing or Latin plant names, yet in the context in which the girls are working, this apparently complex information causes them very little difficulty.

Of course, collaboration was not always as unproblematic as this demonstration. The natural egocentricity of six-year-old children occasionally got in the way. In the following excerpt, for example, Lisa and Barry have some problems with collaboration, although they do eventually resolve them.

Teacher: (to Lisa) Do you know what a fuchsia is?

Barry: (who is a member of the gardening club, interrupts and is ignored) Yes. We've got them in the garden.

Teacher: (to Lisa) Do you know what color it is? Have a look in the index.

Barry: Yes. We've got one in the garden (pointing).

Teacher: (to Lisa) You can look up fuchsia in the index or you can talk to Barry about it. He seems to know a lot about it. (Teacher leaves.)

Barry: (to Lisa) You can look over there. We've got one over there. I've seen it thousands of times.

Lisa: (searching for a particular page in a book having looked in the index) Is that it there? (Shows him a picture. They both look.)

Barry: What? In there?... Do you want to look out of the window and I'll show you?

Lisa: (with mock reluctance, getting up) Oh...(Both go to the window.)

Barry: (pointing) That one there. See that one there. (Lisa nods.)

The children remained at the window for about a minute and were joined by another child who also wanted to look before they were ushered back to their seats by a passing adult. On her way back to the table, Lisa remarked to Barry that the fuchsias in the garden were a different color than the one pictured in the book. Later, she recorded this on her grid, where she wrote "purple and pink or they can be white."

In this brief incident we see Barry clearly determined to display his expertise and able to use his past experience and the availability of real examples to share his knowledge with his peers. Lisa was initially reluctant to be distracted from her task of finding information in a book but eventually relented and went along with Barry's alternative strategy. In doing this she learned something about using different sources of information and that these do not always agree. Both children were learning to be critical of texts they read.

TANGENTIAL TALK

There were numerous examples of children talking together in a way that might simply be seen as conversation that had little to do with the task on which they were engaged. We have referred to such talk as tangential although this should not be taken to mean irrelevant. In fact, much of this conversation did originate from the task itself, and it would be our contention that such talk often functions as a prime mechanism for learning. In the following excerpt, for example, Barry was searching for a picture of a marigold when his attention was caught by a quite different picture.

Barry: Oh! look at that...that's...that's...it's made out of flowers (Points to picture of a flower bed laid out as a ship).

Lisa: There's a Mickey Mouse one...other ones in other places.

Barry: Whoa! That's brilliant.

Lisa: I've seen them millions of times.

Barry: (to Simon) Have you seen them at Torquay? They've got them. Made out of flowers. Them.

Simon: Where?

Barry: Torquay. Where they make them models out of flowers. You been to Torquay? (Simon shakes his head.)

Barry: Been to Paignton?

Lisa: I've been to Paignton. (Torquay and Paignton are local resort towns the children have visited.)

A teacher arriving at this moment might be tempted to conclude that the children were not on task, but in some ways they were because they were making personal connections with the material they were working with.

This linking of previous knowledge and experience to new material is a crucial part of the researching and learning process and reaffirms the importance of conversation rather than silence in young children's learning through inquiry.

EMPOWERMENT THROUGH INFORMATION

Two of the children we observed learned a very important lesson that morning. Lorraine and Charlotte learned that information can be empowering. The pair began by browsing through the gardening books, looking at pictures. From these pictures they decided that they wanted their hanging baskets to contain tomatoes, strawberries, and a bonsai tree. They wrote the names of these three plants in the first column of their grid and were ready to start looking for further information when their teacher joined them. She pointed out that their suggestions were unusual and that they would need to find some good evidence to support these choices. Charlotte and Lorraine were not detracted from their ideas and started to research. In one gardening book they discovered a variety of dwarf trailing tomatoes. In another they found a picture of strawberries in a planter which clearly suggested that these were trailing plants. They presented these findings to their teacher who was clearly a little flustered and could only respond, "But bonsai trees don't grow in baskets. I think you should check that one carefully!"

The children turned their attention to bonsai trees. They discovered a section in one book on the growing and training of bonsai trees. This gave them the information that bonsai trees "can be trained into any shape." They reasoned from this that they could train their bonsai tree to trail over their basket. They worked out that they would need wire for this task but they failed to realize that it might take them 50 years to grow their tree! When their teacher returned, the students were ready to argue their case and defend their choice of plants.

> ***"This linking of previous knowledge and experience to new material is a crucial part of the researching and learning process."***

What these children had learned was that, armed with the appropriate information, a person can argue with power and persuasion. Knowledge can provide the power to argue a case—a lesson central to democracy. Their teacher was humane and responsive enough to concede the argument, not wishing to dampen the children's enthusiasm. It should be noted, however, that when it came to trying to convince their classmates, Lorraine and Charlotte had a much more difficult task.

CONCLUSION

In these brief glimpses of young children, we see that when we provide them with a purpose and a structure to guide them they can successfully use research skills. Our research persuades us that until we have observed children in action following through the demands of a clearly focused inquiry question, we can say little about these children's capabilities or limitations. Children perform to their potential only when they are excited and driven by an inquiry need. During the course of such an inquiry children use talk for a wide range of purposes: to support, to argue, to defend, to explore, and to share. These uses of talk are closely related to the children's perceptions of the task in which they are engaged, and with the nature of the social context the teacher has helped engineer.

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CHAPTER 6

Trusting Students' Questions About Literature: Stories Across Contexts

Michelle Commeyras, Kelly A. Sherrill, and Kimberly Wuenker

Are you curious about children's thinking? Are you interested in finding ways to see things from the perspective of the children you teach? Are you willing to follow the interests of children during discussions of literature? If your answer is yes, then you will be interested in our experiences with literature discussions. We—Michelle Commeyras, a university teacher, and Kimberly Wuenker and Kelly Sherrill, teacher candidates—have learned a great deal from conducting literature discussions that revolve around student-posed questions. We preface what we have learned with a rationale based on a review of educational literature. Michelle summarizes what she has learned about student questioning in a second-grade classroom and how she shares this knowledge with undergraduate elementary education majors. Kim, who interned in a kindergarten classroom, and Kelly, who interned in a fourth grade classroom, analyze their experiences using student-posed questions for literature discussions.

CHILDREN'S QUESTIONS: REVIEW AND RATIONALE

Interest in the questioning activity of children, particularly within the context of schooling, is nothing new. Throughout the twentieth century educators have agreed that children's questions should be a source of curricular interest (Dale, 1937; Dewey, 1944; Dillon, 1988; Hunkins, 1976). One of the earliest studies on children's questioning in school settings was Laura E. Mau's 1912 investigation of the questions kindergartners, first-, second-, and third-grade students asked about physical and biological materials (cited in Dale, 1937). Researchers have long concluded that "it would be worth the while of any teacher to watch to see how many of her children have a spirit of inquiry, whether their questions show thought, and then to consider how she can use these questions to better her instruction" (Thompson, 1924). This awareness of the pedagogical importance of children's questions has also been evident in texts on educational methods and theories of learning for at least 50 years (Fahey, 1942). For example, consider the words of prominent educational philosopher John Dewey:

> No one has ever explained why children are so full of questions outside of the school (so that they pester grown-up persons if they get any encouragement), and the conspicuous absence of display of curiosity about the subject matter of school lessons. Reflection on this striking contrast will throw light upon the question of how far customary school conditions supply a context of experience in which problems naturally suggest themselves. (Dewey, 1944)

What is curious is the gap between this educational rhetoric and practice with regard to student-posed questions in school. Researchers have repeatedly found that in a single day teachers ask hundreds of questions of their students (Dillon, 1988; Gall, 1970). For example, in a study of third-grade reading groups, Gambrell (1983) reported that on average teachers asked a question every 43 seconds. The proliferation of teacher questioning is in sharp contrast to the limited amount of student questioning. It is reported that student questions and studies of student questions are comparatively rare (Carlsen, 1991).

Nevertheless, there are some practitioner-oriented articles written by teachers describing what occurs when questioning is shifted to students. Kitagawa (1982) wrote about what happened when she put her fourth and fifth grade students in the questioning role in all subject areas. During a guided reading of a Martin Luther King, Jr. biography, she realized that her students asked questions that differed from her own but "fit the passage as well as mine and actually led more directly into the next segment" (p. 45). Ten years later, Ash (1992) wrote about how astonished and impressed she was by the questions students generated when she read them the opening line of Armstong's *Sounder* (1969). These were not advanced English students, but students enrolled in an alternative program for those at risk of becoming high school dropouts. The experiences Kitagawa and Ash had with students discussing their own questions about literature reflect the growing trend in reading instruction toward more reader-centered forms of literature discussion (Peterson & Eeds, 1990; Raphael & McMahon, 1994). This trend represents a departure from students' attempt to comprehend text in order to

> *"The proliferation of teacher questioning is in sharp contrast to the limited amount of student questioning."*

find the "correct" answers to questions found in teacher manuals and tests. Instead, students pose the questions rather than the teacher, and the questions become a tool in constructing meaning.

STUDENTS' QUESTIONS AND TEACHER EDUCATION: MICHELLE COMMEYRAS

I have been collaborating with Georgiana Sumner, a second-grade teacher, on literacy research since 1992. We originally set out to research the process of transferring responsibility from teacher to students for a discussion format designed to promote critical thinking (Commeyras, 1993). This led to a study of what occurred when seven- and eight-year-old students were given responsibility for posing questions for discussion after listening to a literature selection (Commeyras & Sumner, 1995). The qualitative analyses we conducted on discussion transcripts revealed that inviting students to offer questions for whole-class or peer-group discussions of literature yielded the following educationally beneficial outcomes:

- Students of all reading abilities were motivated by the opportunity to pose and discuss their questions about literature.
- Students discussed issues that they found important to their present and future lives (death, prejudice, and romantic relationships).
- Students engaged in an array of reading, writing, and oral language that matched grade level core curriculum objectives (editing for punctuation, interpreting semantic relationships, and rereading for understanding).
- Students exhibited an interest in the wording of questions and a sensitivity to subtle shifts in the meaning of questions depending on word choice.
- Students engaged in the types of thinking that are viewed as educationally valuable (identifying unstated assumptions, seeking alternatives, and providing reasons).

Over the course of three years of listening to second graders discuss their own questions, Georgiana and I have learned that we value all of their questions. At first we thought it was important to get students to ask the kinds of questions we thought were profound or would elicit critical thinking. We have come to understand that children will ask about whatever they think is interesting, bewildering, or peculiar. Furthermore, we believe that student questioning will become commonplace when teachers trust their students' natural inquisitiveness and seek ways to encourage and support their ability to articulate and write questions.

It is my challenge as a university teacher to communicate to my students what Georgiana and I have learned about questioning. I teach a two-course sequence on reading instruction in elementary school. Following is a description of how I introduced the value of student-posed questions to Kim and Kelly, as well as the other students in their class. This description provides the background for Kim's and Kelly's experiences of student questioning during a four-week field experience at the end of their second course.

TEACHER EDUCATION ON STUDENT-POSED QUESTIONS

I always read *Me & Neesie* (Greenfield & Barnett, 1975) to get my students to think about questioning. *Me & Neesie* is about a preschool girl, Janell, and her imaginary friend, Neesie. Even though Janell's family cannot see or hear Neesie, the two girls still manage to get into mischief at home. Neesie is good company, but the situation changes when Janell begins attending school. While Janell is excited about her first day, Neesie seems sad. Janell returns from her first day of school eager to tell Neesie about her teacher and new friends. Neesie is nowhere to be found and seems to have disappeared forever.

Before reading the story, I direct the college students to think, as they listen, of questions they would pose to stimulate a discussion with second graders. I also ask that they predict the questions that second-grade children might have about the story. After I read the story, we list on the chalkboard the questions they have generated. We classify the questions as either teacher-type or child-like. Briefly, we compare the questions in the two categories, discussing the differences and similarities. Next, I provide a transcript of a discussion of *Me & Neesie* that Georgiana Sumner conducted in her second-grade classroom during the first week of a school year. The undergraduates read the portion of the transcript in which seven- and eight-year-old children offer questions for discussion. Meanwhile, I write the second graders' questions on the chalkboard next to our questions. We then consider how the second graders' questions compare with those of the college students. They find that some of the second graders' questions are similar to their teacher questions, and other questions are far more unusual than what they predicted children would ask.

Toward the end of the lesson on student questioning, I show a video sequence of second graders posing their questions about *Me & Neesie*. Having already familiarized themselves with the transcript, the class is able to attend to the pedagogical moves Georgiana employs to facilitate the posing of questions and the eventual discussion of questions. After viewing the video, we evaluate the discussion, how it was conducted, and how the second graders participated. Finally, as a resource, each student receives the brochure Georgiana and I wrote for educators, "Student-Posed Questions for Literature-Based Discussion" (Commeyras & Sumner, ND).

The introduction to student questioning I have described occurred during Kim's and Kelly's first reading methods course. In their next course I required that each student, during their four weeks of field experience in area elementary schools, conduct at least two discussions of a basal reading selection, trade book, or textbook reading assignment where students pose their own questions. I modeled with *The Paper Crane* (Bang, 1985) the approach I would use with a first or second grade class. The college students cooperated by offering questions and responses to questions. They also received directions for writing a concise plan for their grade level assignment. They were to specify (a) what reading materials would be used; (b) who would do the reading; (c) whether they would have whole-class or small-group discussion; (d) how posing questions would be explained to students; and (e) how questions would be recorded and discussed.

I read and critiqued each student's plan, and many were revised before being approved. With carefully conceived plans for conducting both reading lessons and literature discussions, Kim, Kelly, and their classmates were ready to put their ideas into practice. During the four weeks that students were teaching, I had the opportunity to observe many literature discussions based on student-posed questions. These novice teachers found unique ways of applying student-generated questions across classroom and curricular contexts. Kim's and Kelly's experiences exemplify the creative manner in which their classes explored ways of conducting discussions based on the questions of students.

KINDERGARTNERS LEARNING TO QUESTION: KIMBERLY WUENKER

Kindergarten was a new frontier for me. Although I was excited to begin my four-week teaching practicum, I knew that teaching in a culturally and linguistically diverse classroom would be a challenge. The school was located near a family housing complex where people from around the world lived while studying at the University of Georgia. In my class of 17 five- and six-year-old children, there were 11 students for whom English was a second language. These 11 children were from countries in Africa, Asia, Europe, and South America, and 3 of them were only beginning to learn English. The 6 children who were born in the United States and whose first language was English were the minority in this class. Therefore, I was concerned about my ability to communicate effectively with each child. There was also a wide range of abilities and skills among the children. Even though I knew this was typical of most kindergarten classes, I felt unprepared to meet this challenge. However, I was enthusiastic because I love children and teaching and was eager to discover the enormous power of teaching and the ability to touch lives forever.

After being introduced to student-posed questions in our university class, I was excited to try it with students. While enrolled in the reading methods course, I had used student questioning with a fourth-grade student whom I tutored in a class for Chapter 1 students in a nearby school. The student's teacher had complimented me on helping him to increase his reading comprehension level, and I began my practicum experience with that in mind. For this reason, I felt confident about using student-posed questions with a fourth grader, but I will admit that I was hesitant about using this strategy with kindergartners.

FIRST DISCUSSION: TRIAL AND ERROR

If I had not experienced success with student-posed questions in the past, I would never have used this tactic after my first attempt with kindergartners. In my view, the lesson did not go well. I began by explaining that my goal was to introduce them to the concept of students asking questions instead of the teacher. Then, I read them *The Vegetables Go to Bed* (King & Grandpre, 1994). I chose this title because we were studying plants. I periodically stopped and asked for questions while reading. Every response was a comment instead of a question. I had assumed they knew what a question was, and I was too surprised by their responses to know what to do.

After a day of reflection, I realized that even though the lesson had not gone well, I had learned a great deal from the experience. I decided to try again with a small group of students who met with me for a writing workshop. I planned on using this group's ability to read individual words to help them understand what I meant by "asking questions." Then they could model questioning for the rest of the class in a follow-up session.

SECOND DISCUSSION: SMALL GROUP

During writing workshop I presented my students with a list of words: who, what, when, where, why, will, do, and how. I explained that these were "question words" and "we use these words to begin questions." The children took turns reading the list, I gave them examples of questions, then I asked them for questions. It worked; they loved to ask questions and did not want to stop.

Now we were ready for a story. I had selected *In the Middle of the Night* (Henderson & Eachus, 1992), a story about occupations and events that happen at night while everyone else is sleeping. I began reading and waited for the first question to come. It did not take long. The following is a sample of the questions they asked:

> Why is the baby sleeping?
>
> Why is it nighttime?
>
> Why is she cleaning at night?
>
> What do her children do?
>
> Why is that lady not at home sleeping with her children?
>
> Why did the mother and father have the baby at night?
>
> Why was the nurse watching the man die?

Every time I looked up while reading, their small hands were up and waving at me. They were excited about asking their own questions.

There were a few times when I found it necessary to rephrase a question before recording it, but before doing so, it was important for me to consider the following: "Am I rephrasing so that it will make sense to others?" or "Am I rephrasing because they did not use standard English?"

We did not discuss questions when they were posed; I simply recorded them on a large piece of construction paper and then we returned to them when we finished the story. The most interesting questions to me were the ones that seemed obvious (such as "Why is the baby sleeping?). I wondered if students posed them simply for the sake of asking a question or because their comprehension was limited. Many of the questions were excellent in terms of levels of thinking and, during our discussion, students offered creative responses to all of the questions.

> ***"The students' interpretations are not necessarily our interpretations, but they make us aware of their thinking, their backgrounds, and their beliefs about life."***

Our discussions helped me realize the importance of listening to students. Children's questions are not always the same as our "adult teacher" questions. Their interpretations are not necessarily our interpretations, but they make us aware of their thinking, their backgrounds, and their beliefs about life. For example, I learned that most of the children were puzzled to learn about people working at night. They wondered how you could work when you are supposed to be sleeping. It was fun for me to talk and share ideas with them. I felt confident now that the small group of kindergartners could ask questions about books—but could the rest of the class?

THIRD DISCUSSION: WHOLE GROUP

The question words I had used with the small group were displayed on the chalkboard for all the students to see. I began by asking, "Who from my small group remembers how we asked questions yesterday? Can you give us a question?" All five students responded with a question. Next, a student read the list of question words, and the whole class read the list again chorally. I talked about questions that "you may or may not already know the answer to." I told them that they could ask either kind of question because "all questions are good questions." They were ready! Hands flew up in the air and to my surprise and delight, no comments were given, only questions. The modeling had worked well.

Next I began to read *Whatever Happened to the Dinosaurs?* (Most, 1984) because I expected this book to inspire many questions. Students immediately noticed that the title of the book was a question. "It ends with a question mark," one child said. "It starts with 'what,' and that's from the list we learned," said another. I knew they were listening and learning. While I read, they were completely engaged. When I asked for questions, the students raised their hands, and many called out, "Ooohh, oohh, pick me Miss Wuenker, I have a good one." The questions they asked seemed very natural. One child asked, "What does disguise mean?" Another child answered, "It means something people wear so other people won't know who they are." This prompted the comment, "You might be a dino in disguise!" The class giggled.

One of the most exciting things I did was ask children how they felt about asking their own questions. Their responses included:

> It helps me learn better.
>
> Someone might be able to tell someone else the answer, so others will learn.
>
> I can understand the book better.
>
> I like to be a part of the story.

I was impressed with the insight these five- and six-year-old children had about the value of questioning.

FOURTH GRADERS QUESTIONING ACROSS TEXTS: KELLY SHERRILL

As I drove to my new school, I thought about all the assignments I was expected to complete during my four weeks of field experience. I had to teach writing workshop, math lessons on fractions, and an integrated unit on Greece. I also had the unique assignment of conducting at least two literature discussions based on student-posed questions and reflecting on the outcome of each discussion. I was skeptical about the students' ability to ask questions and about their reactions to being given the power to determine what would be discussed. Furthermore, I was skeptical about how successful I would be in a school located in a rural, working-class community that was so different from my own schooling experiences in metro-suburban Atlanta and from my recent tutoring experiences in schools near the University of Georgia.

STUDENTS, CLASSROOM, AND CURRICULAR CONTEXT

There were 27 fourth graders in the class, but only 17 of these students were in my reading class. Of the 17 students, 4 were African American and 13 were European-American; 12 were boys and 5 were girls. I found it unsettling that the classroom was cramped and did not appear to have been cleaned or organized for many years. Conditions were further complicated by a noisy window air conditioner and also a computer printer, shared by six other classrooms, which ran intermittently all day long.

Nevertheless, I was enthusiastic about teaching and eager to find out how the two-week unit I had planned on "Greece: Then and Now" would be received. I had carefully considered what literature to use and decided on Aesop's fables and Greek mythology. I had planned three discussion sessions based on student-posed questions. Each session would be based on a fable or on a myth that I thought would provoke interesting questions and discussion.

ASSUMPTIONS, CONCERNS, AND RESERVATIONS ABOUT STUDENT-POSED QUESTIONS

When my university class was introduced to the idea of students asking discussion questions, I kept thinking that students would take the easy way out. I just knew that they would ask literal questions that they could answer readily, and that would yield only one right answer. I envisioned the student who, when called on to ask a question, would answer, "Everyone else has already asked my questions." I feared, too, that many of the students would choose not to write any questions. I was wary about students making pencil drawings while they were supposed to be listening and writing, and also worried that certain students would dominate, overshadowing the less assured students. I was concerned about getting whole-class participation.

I expected that background knowledge and prior experience would play a large role in the interpretation and understanding of the fables and myths. However, if students were unfamiliar with the genre of fables and myths, how could student-posed questions be formed without my help? I worried that students would simply focus on finding the moral of each story, bypassing opportunities for more detailed analysis. I wondered if they would make comparisons across fables and myths by attending to elements of each story. I wanted to act merely as facilitator but anticipated that a lengthy, in-depth discussion would require teacher questioning, because I feared students would cover all their questions in only 10–15 minutes.

DISCUSSION OF "THE FOX AND THE CROW"

The first day I tried student-posed questions, I began by defining a fable and by explaining that I would read three versions of "The Fox and the Crow." While I read, the students were asked to write one question about each story. I told them that a question might apply to all three stories or to a single version. I emphasized that it was acceptable to have questions for which the answer became apparent as the story unfolded or to have questions where no one could be sure what the answer was. I stressed that any question is a good question. After I read the stories aloud, I made a column on the chalkboard for each story. As students revealed their questions, I recorded each one in the appropriate column. I was thrilled with the outcome, because it was obvious that the inquiry process was active in every child's mind. I was impressed with their questions, which included the following:

Table 1

Fox & Crow - Rice (1979, pp. 5-9)	Fox & Crow - Hague (1985, p. 25)	Fox & Crow - Testa (1989)
Why did the fox lick his lips?	How was the crow seen by the fox?	Why did the crow trust the fox?
Why does the fox always trick the crow?	Why was the fox always complimenting the crow?	Why did the story use "meat" instead of "cheese?"
What does exquisite mean?	Who was the Queen of the Birds?	Where did the crow get the meat?

When the questions were displayed on the chalkboard, we began considering each in turn until we had discussed them all. I was amazed at the ability of each child to understand the process of questioning literature, because to my knowledge it was their first experience doing so. Nobody wrote a question that he or she already knew the answer to; if the answers came to them before the discussion began, this was fine—it showed that they were thinking about what they asked. All of the questions were relevant to the fables, and all the children were willing to contribute a question or two. While discussing possible answers, I was again amazed, this time with their maturity in thinking about one another's questions. Some questions were easily answered (such as, Who flew over the fox's head?—The crow flew over the fox.). Other questions led to deeper thinking and debate. For example, students offered creative responses that went beyond the story while considering the question, "Who was the Queen of the Birds?"

Teon: That's easy. The bald eagle is Queen of the Birds. It's the United States bird, so it has to be queen.

Josh: Nah-ah. Birds are all over the world. The bald eagle only stands for the United States. Just because it is the symbol of our country doesn't mean that it is queen of the whole world.

Brandon: Yeah, so it would depend on what place or country you are in for who would be Queen of the Birds.

Our discussion also involved considering whether we had adequately answered our questions. For a time the discussion shifted to reviewing questions to see if any of them were similar. We concluded by summarizing for ourselves the moral of "The Fox and The Crow," a process which led students to share anecdotes about times when they had lied to or flattered someone to get what they wanted.

LEARNING ABOUT STUDENTS

Lively exchanges like the one that follows taught me that the fourth graders were interested in finding reasons and developing alternative interpretations rather than simply looking for one right answer. The students were discussing a question about the Greek myth *Deucalion and Pyrrha and the Great Flood* (D'Aulaire & D'Aulaire, 1962): "Why did stones turn into people?"

Jonathan: They wanted to start a new race [of people] that would not fight, like have wars and stuff because they were like...they were killer people, stealing from others and they [the gods] wanted some new race where they would be right.

Caroline: Because it's a myth and it's magic.

Brandon: Because the gods wanted to start a new world.

Caroline: Miss Sherrill, in a myth anything can happen because it's just wrote down and it's not real.

Brian: Probably when water hits the stones it probably turned into people.

Jonathan: They threw them over their shoulders, Brian. They didn't throw them into the water.

Brandon: Maybe they threw them over their shoulder and they landed in the water.

With every question and answer offered by a student, we can learn something about that student's personality, background, values, and feelings. For example, later in the same discussion I learned more about the children's religious convictions. One student defensively stated, "Heaven is in the sky and not on Mount Olympus." Although other students tried to explain that this myth was written long ago and people in that time period believed differently than she did, she remained unconvinced.

THE TEACHER'S ROLE AS FACILITATOR

The teacher must play a part in the management and organization of the discussions. Sometimes we choose the text for discussion and other times we help students choose the text by providing book talks about selections that they might find interesting. The teacher must also think ahead in planning the practicalities of time and space. Questions such as the following guided my planning and preparation:

How will students' questions be recorded?

How will I encourage the questions from the students?

Where will questions be displayed?
How many questions should I display?
Should we discuss each question when it is posed or record a list of questions?
Should I contribute any questions of my own?

REFLECTIONS ON MY ASSUMPTIONS

From my experience conducting discussions based on student-posed questions, I realized that my original assumptions were mostly false. The students did not ask only questions they could answer; perhaps they realized that would not be fun or challenging. They always wrote down more questions than asked for, and many of the usually quiet students were the most active participants. Of course, I had to curb extraneous talking and call on those whose attention faltered at times, but generally the students were actively involved. The students' goals were not to figure out morals or make comparisons; rather, they strove to make sense of what confused them or what they wanted to learn. I realized that in order for the discussions to be entirely student-generated, I had to let the students decide what were the most important issues to be discussed and solved. If I had prior expectations about what they needed to deliberate, the discussion was no longer student-directed.

CONCLUSION

The experiences we have shared about teacher-facilitated literature discussions that revolve around student questioning should inspire other educators to explore the potential of their students' questions. Kim and Kelly have been candid about the reservations they had about using student-posed questions as the basis of literature discussions. Clearly, it is easier to recognize the benefits of questions than it is to believe that they will work in a teacher's own classroom. It is significant that Kim and Kelly, in their first weeks of public school teaching, were able to find ways to use students' questions to create lively discussions where children used critical and creative thinking to construct meaningful interpretations of text.

Our experiences with the questions students want to talk about after reading or listening to literature have convinced us that teacher-led literature discussions should rely more often on students' questions. This would allow whole-class or reading-group discussions to be more like the discussions children have when allowed to talk about stories in peer-only literature groups. Almasi (1995) has reported in a study of both teacher-led and peer-led literature discussion groups that students ask significantly more questions in peer discussions and that complex dialogue results from children's questions to one another. We as teachers can capitalize on what naturally occurs when students get together to talk about shared readings by bringing their questions into those literature discussions where our role is more facilitator than leader. This shift requires that we surrender our proclivity as teachers to want to control everything that goes on in our classroom in favor of giving students more responsibility for their own learning. In a recent study of feminist pedagogy, Maher and Tetreault (1994) found that the use of student questions was one way teachers successfully reversed hierarchical classroom dynamics that place all the authority for knowing with the teacher. Allowing classroom discourse to follow student questions may be the beginning of a revolution in how we think about where knowledge comes from and how it can be shared and learned. We have a vision that one day in the future it will be commonplace to see teachers and students gathering together in lively discussions of literature where everyone is asking questions.

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CHAPTER 7

Idea Circles: Peer Collaborations for Conceptual Learning

John T. Guthrie and Ann D. McCann

WHAT IS AN IDEA CIRCLE?

Mrs. Lucy Schwartz's fifth grade classroom in Calverton, Maryland, USA, is brimming with the sound of students' voices. She is mingling among the groups of students, encouraging them to talk with each other. They are involved in a debate, and the topic must be interesting, judging by the energy in the voices that are vying to be heard. Passing books around in small groups, the students are pointing to pictures and captions, taking notes, and composing paragraphs.

In one group, five boys are engaged in discussing animals and their various adaptive behaviors. They are focused on making a chart with several different animals and an example of a unique, adaptive behavior for each one. Their teacher has indicated that they should work as a team to decide what information they choose to place on their charts. The chart is shown in Table 1. No leader of the team was officially designated, but one has emerged. With guidance from the leader, five animals are chosen: koala bear, ruby-throated hummingbird, anteater, fox, and fruit bat. The members of the team start to search through books on animal adaptation that are available on their desks. The team skims, jots down notes, and fills in answers with facility as they check for consistency in one another's answers and move swiftly toward consensus.

Suddenly, the dialogue shifts. One of the members challenges the leader about the feeding habits of the fruit bat. He does not believe that they hang from vines while eating, as the leader has suggested. Other members of the team join in the challenge by looking through books and fact-checking in the interest of the group. The leader actually finds the information that contradicts his earlier statement. The fruit bat apparently clings to the fruit it is consuming, not a vine while it eats. He shares this clarification with his team members by reading the pertinent passage out loud. The rest of the team accommodates the change on

Table 1
Chart to guide collaborative discussion.

	Adaptations		
	Animal	Location	Features/Use
Breeding			
Climate			
Feeding			

their sheets, having learned something new in the process. The cycle of theorizing, questioning, challenging, and consensus begins again as the group moves on to discuss the fox.

We refer to scenarios like these as idea circles. An idea circle is a peer-led, small group discussion of concepts fueled by multiple text sources. In this chapter, we will describe the relationship between idea circles and student learning. From a representative sampling of research literature, we will describe what is known about idea circles, their place in instruction, and why discussions of this nature are positive for student learning. We seek to provide educators with enough knowledge of idea circles to create them in their own classrooms. We also hope to raise the awareness of researchers who might explore the roles and benefits of idea circles.

WHAT DO STUDENTS DO IN IDEA CIRCLES?

In many classrooms students participate in discussions about literature. These discussions often consist of a teacher leading the entire class or of peers leading small groups. Literature discussions usually center on a single literary text such as a short story, poem, or novel. Children participate in the dialogue in order to interpret or explicate the literary work. While attending to operations of the plot, motives of the characters, the conflicts within the story, and perhaps their resolutions, the students portray a broad meaning that is endowed with their own background experiences and beliefs (Almasi & Gambrell, 1994). This broader meaning is the interpretation of the piece of literature.

The aim of group discussion in idea circles is different than the aim of a literature discussion. In idea circles, children are learning a concept. What unites the children in dialogue is the particular concept. For example, children might study the concept of rivers, examining where they are located, how they flow, and how they contribute to a water cycle. In literature discussions, students share a single text; whereas in idea circles, students share a single concept, using multiple texts to learn about it (see Hartman & Allison, this volume).

The basic ingredients of a concept are facts, relations among the facts, and explanations. For example, the concept of a *river* contains facts about their length and depth, relations between types and shapes of rivers, and explanations for their flowing patterns. In literature discussions, the interpretation is constructed by learners through details of plot, character, and episode. The theme is an abstraction. Likewise, in learning a concept, students build the abstract understanding from specific information, details, and data (Chi, DeLeeuw, & Lavancher, 1994).

Learning in idea circles is based on an evolving consensus among the participants. As students contribute information and linkages between facts, they build a conceptual framework. In literature discussions, however, students may diverge in their thinking. Conflicting interpretations about a theme and diversity of a viewpoint are encouraged by some teachers. Although both literature discussion groups and idea circles depend on text-based information, literature circles encourage the possibility of different conclusions, whereas idea circles promote the participants' convergence of conceptual understanding (see Table 2).

“*Although both literature discussion groups and idea circles depend on text-based information, literature circles encourage the possibility of different conclusions, whereas idea circles promote the participants' convergence of conceptual understanding.*”

HOW DO STUDENTS CONSTRUCT CONCEPTS IN A GROUP?

Most successful idea circles are small teams of three to six members. Although it is possible to have whole class discussion that builds toward conceptual development, peer collaboration is often needed to learn higher-order explanations. It may often require 4–6 weeks for a team to build cohesion. Not established overnight, this cohesion demands the guidance of a teacher. The teacher or idea circle leader helps students discuss and make public rules for their dialogue. If asked, most elementary students will admit that the success of an idea circle is based on the participants' ability to “listen to each other,” “speak one at a time,” “let everyone have a turn,” and “listen to the leader” (O'Flahavan, 1989).

Table 2
Two varieties of classroom discussion.

	Literature circle	Idea circle
Similarities		
Group size	3–6 Students	3–6 Students
Group leadership	Peer-led	Peer-led
Interaction rules	Visible, student generated	Visible, student generated
Teacher instruction	Preview, monitor, debrief	Preview, monitor, debrief
Distinctions		
Group goal	Literary interpretation	Concept learning
Text usage	Single text	Multiple texts
Interpretation	Diversity	Consensus
Familiarity with topic	Optional	Needed
Prereading of text	Needed	Desirable

The rules can be written and posted in view of the group (see Wiencek, this volume, for a discussion of how to assist students with the creation of such rules). Explicating these rules can foster the interactivity needed to meet the challenge of conceptual learning in the team (Johnson, Johnson, Stanne, & Garibaldi, 1990).

Each student brings unique information to the table. Participants in an idea circle contribute information that is distinctive, based on previous experience, recent reading, or discussions with other students. They will combine this information with input from other learners in the construction process (Hutchins, 1991). Students may also bring their unique expertise to an idea circle. For example, if some learners have gained ability in using a tool (such as a compass or a computer), they may bring this expertise to the group process. It has been shown that the quality of thinking and problem solving is higher for groups in which the information and expertise are distributed across the members than groups in which all members have the same information (Johnson, Johnson, & Stanne, 1989).

In the idea circle, information and expertise are distributed. Different members have different competencies that flow toward a common goal. A popular configuration is the jigsaw (Aronson, 1978). In this pattern, students learn about a particular topic or how to use a particular tool in one set of teams. For example, in an ecology unit students may form separate teams to learn about rivers, mountains, and climate. Students then regroup into the continents of North America, South America, and Africa with an expert in rivers, mountains, and climate participating in each of the continent groups. Both of these types of groupings are idea circles. But the information is more widely distributed in the second set (the continents). When expertise is distributed, more information is likely to be offered by individuals, checked by other individuals, and discussed more deeply.

A number of authors have examined the types of discourse that occur in group discussions of informational texts. For example, Pontecorvo (1993) reports that children's discussions of history texts are dominated by claims and justifications. Children attempt to make claims about events and people and to justify their claims with the textbook or with their own knowledge. Group discussions among adults are more complex. For example, when adults are involved in a debate (for example, about whether nuclear energy is good policy for a country) they usually exchange premises, claims, challenges, answers to challenges, concessions, and conclusions (Resnick, Salmon, Zeitz, Wathen, & Holowchak, 1993). Adults who are more adept at balancing these conversational elements are more likely to be persuasive in their arguments. Similarly, in idea circles, elementary school students exchange facts, relations among facts, and explanations. The ability to coordinate the development of facts and explanations around a given concept is learned slowly as students gain facility in conceptual learning (Chi et al., 1994; Kuhn, Amsel, & O'Loughlin, 1988).

To build their conceptual understanding in an idea circle, students place an emphasis on integration of information. Understanding about rivers or fruit bats requires students to weave together a significant number of important details. Informational texts support students in meeting this challenge because informational books provoke students to integrate prior knowledge, information from peers, and text-based ideas (Leal, 1992). As students offer information to their peers, they are monitored by other class members. Students will check the accuracy of other students' facts and press their co-learners for explanations (Meloth & Deering, 1994). This press for explanation encourages students to search for information, comprehend texts that have been found, and synthesize information from multiple sources. The work of an idea circle is not simply recollection, which can often be observed in teacher-led discussions (Edwards, 1993). Students are not merely led by a teacher or a peer-leader to recall and compile facts. In contrast, students use a variety of cognitive strategies to interact with texts for the purpose of new learning.

The conceptual aim of an idea circle should be clear to the members. A simple question may suffice. For example, "What is a river?" may be a suitable overarching aim. When answering this question, the students should be expected to give an explanation. They should be asked why the river is different than a stream, an ocean, or rainfall. Although students have a natural urge to explain the world around them, teachers should make the requirement for explanation explicit.

The most desirable goals are open-ended. They invite a variety of facts, information, and interconnections. If students are permitted to choose how they express their understanding of the concept, how they learn about it, and how they assemble their ideas, they will be more intrinsically motivated than if the goal permits less freedom (Skinner & Belmont, 1992). We have observed that open goals that challenge the most ingenious students will also elicit the highest amount of cooperation. Our theoretical expectation is that concept learning will be accelerated in idea circles in which the goal is conceptual (Johnson et al., 1990; Meloth & Deering, 1994), the social interchanges are most interactive, and the students employ a diversity of strategies for literacy (Brown, Ash, Rutherford, Nakagawa, Gordon, & Capione, 1993).

CLASSROOM EXAMPLES

These examples are drawn from classrooms committed to an integrated science/language arts curriculum. The students participate in a sequence of hands-on science activities embedded within extended thematic units. Language arts instruction is based exclusively on trade books and literature that revolve around the science theme. Known as Concept-Oriented Reading Instruction (CORI), this curriculum includes a variety of collaborative structures, including whole class, small teams, individual work, and idea circles.

In Mrs. Andrea Muttis's third grade classroom in Lanham, Maryland, USA, small teams are inherent to the daily activities. The children sit in heterogenous teams of five or six students, and these groupings are intact for the entire day. The teacher requires that most of the work in the integrated science/language arts curriculum be done with discussion as an important part. The children have had exposure to participation in literature circles, and the rules of interaction are also supposed to be in effect during idea circles. Each team has their rules posted on the bulletin board as they are working.

The team was asked to think about the birds they had been studying for a period of weeks. Each child has been researching a bird of his or her choosing. They were to find amazing facts about their bird in a selection of information books and share them with their team members. The students chose their books from a crate of multi-level trade books all containing vital information about birds (the books in the group crate are listed in Table 3). After the facts were discussed and approved by the other children, each student was to write the amazing facts on a semi-structured sheet the teacher created with space allocated for writing and drawing their bird.

After the children spent a few minutes locating a book that contained relevant information about their bird, they read silently for a few minutes to arm themselves with knowledge for the discussion.

David: I did not know the purple martin was the darkest bird.
Jaroll (to Kelly): Listen to this...the adult lives in the north.
Kelly (to Jaroll): We learned that before.

The teacher drops by the group to check on their discussion and prompts the children to ask each other why their facts are amazing.

Table 3

List of books for bird unit collected in the group crate.

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Baker, L. (1990). *Eagles.* New York: Puffin.
Bacon, R. (1988). *Save our earth.* Auckland, NZ: Shortland.
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Kent (to Yomana): You wanna write about the owl? You gotta put the page number here.

Jaroll: Listen to this—s'cuse me, I'm reading. I'll read…

Metron: (The Canada goose) hunts for its own food and can eat by itself right after it's hatched. I never knew that (they) eat right after birth.

The children are each referring to a book from the group crate; three are the same and three are different. Kelly is checking Metron's fact about the Canada goose in one of the books.

Kelly: Right after? It's the day after. Not right after. Why is that amazing?

Metron: Because I did not know.

Kelly: Mine is amazing because I did not know my bird (the brown pelican) could fly that far.

David: I never knew that much either. I'll write out the picture for my amazing fact. I have never seen a blue jay in my life. That's an amazing fact.

Kent asks David to come over and look at a picture in Yomana's book about the great horned owl. The owl has a skunk in its talons, and the previous page shows the owl swooping down on the skunk. The boys flip back and forth and agree that this sequence would be great for Yomana to draw. Yomana does not respond verbally, but continues writing information about her owl.

Metron: (Looking at his book) Airplane shapes are modeled after birds!! Do they (birds) have weapons?

David: Eagles have weapons.

Kelly: (to David and Metron) You gotta tell why. It's hard to draw a pelican. Maybe I should change my picture, because I don't want to draw when they migrate.

The children have been working for almost 45 minutes. The teacher stops by the group to prompt the children to tell each other the facts they wrote about and why they were amazing.

Metron: (to Jaroll) You start. (From his sheet, Jaroll reads his facts about mallards and how they molt.)

Metron: (interrupting Jaroll) Let me read mine.

Jaroll tries to continue with his facts and statements of why they were amazing to him. Metron starts reading his paper from the top (including the date).

Kelly: (wanting Metron to cut to the chase) We already know the date. Read your labels.

Jaroll: He didn't label.

Kelly (to Metron): You didn't write why.

Metron: Yes I did.

David reads his remarks about the purple martin. He did not get very far in his writing. Kelly helps him with some of the words he cannot pronounce. Kelly reads her facts about the brown pelican next. She then tries to get Kent to read his about the crow. Kent does not want to. He is not done writing.

Although Kelly did not read aloud her text, it read as follows:

> Brown Pelicans' eyes are pale-blue, with bright pink skin around them. While the birds are incubating their eyes fade to white, the pink skin becomes a paler shade, and the yellow feathers are lost. I think that fact is amazing to me because I never know that when brown pelicans lay eggs, they change colors and lose their yellow feathers.

This team showed a high level of social interaction between the members. A minimal amount of time was spent determining the rules of speaking and listening. Turn-taking was respected, and each member was encouraged to participate. The discussion included many levels of inquiry and challenge, going beyond the original quest to learn amazing facts. The children wrestled with the qualifiers for what made certain facts amazing and not others. They learned about what made an acceptable explanation for one's opinion, and they searched different information books to prove or disprove facts in question. After exchanging their ideas and receiving constructive feedback, they were each responsible for their own product.

In their collaboration, the team gained a conceptual understanding of animal adaptations. They learned that birds have a magnificent array of physical features that help them live. Birds acquire unusual behaviors, such as migration, to survive. These structures and unusual behaviors documented the principle of animal adaptation, although the biological term was not used.

In contrast, fifth grade students in Mrs. Schwartz's classrooms described at the beginning of this chapter, were able to use such terms as "adaptation" and "habitat" to foster their communication. Mrs. Schwartz's students attained the concept of feeding as a vital principle in survival. Furthermore, they discovered that different species feed in distinctive ways, enabling them to respond to the environment in which they live. Both third graders and fifth graders in these instances gained a conceptual understanding that different species acquire distinctive physical structures and behavioral functions that enable them to live in their environments.

In a different third grade classroom, the idea circle was being introduced to the students as a new form of social interaction. The children in Mrs. Carly Peter's class in Calverton, Maryland, USA were accustomed to sitting in teams of five or six that remained intact throughout the day. These students were also studying birds in great depth as part of an integrated science/language arts program. Each team had been concentrating on learning about one bird for many weeks.

In contrast to Mrs. Muttis's classroom, Mrs. Peter elected to mix up the team members. She wanted to have a student representative of each bird present in one of the following new teams: feeding, breeding, shelter, habitat, and defense. These "interest" teams were to discuss their topic as a group with each member contributing expertise about the relevant habits of the particular bird of which they were an expert. The children each had a sheet of notes about the bird on which they had previously focused their research. Each team possessed a crate of familiar books on birds to consult if necessary.

Mrs. Peter indicated that the team goal was to create a web of their concept with all of the supporting information they had shared.

There were no posted guidelines for the social structure of the new groupings. Mrs. Peter's class was not as familiar with literature circles and the rules of interaction that accompany them. Thus, when the children were arranged into this new jigsaw configuration, it was clear that the seven "habitat" students were unfamiliar with each other. They seemed to have difficulty falling into a constructive pattern of talking and listening.

Mrs. Peter: Now you're in an idea circle. Each person knows lots of information. If you need more, you can use the books. What could each person say about your bird?

Karl reads his paper in a humorous voice. The other children (six girls) argue over who will be next. Ana starts to read but she is interrupted by Karl.

Karl: Where does the eagle live—In parts of the desert.

Ana urges the others to pay attention, Karol reads her sheet of notes out loud, but so softly nobody can understand her. Karl makes snoring noises. Ellen reads her barn owl notes without attending to the issue of habitat. Nakata and Sharon decide that Nakata should read next. Karl nominates himself to read again. Ana and Katie are upset because they have not read yet.

Karl: We're talking about where he lives.

Karol: (to Linda) You don't have to read the whole paragraph.

Mrs. Peter is circulating among the new teams. She listens in to assess the quality of discussion and intervenes if the children seem to need some guidance to get on track.

Mrs. Peter: Think about where your birds live, how their parts help it to live. You need to work a little more on your interaction. Habitat combines many ideas: where it lives, how it finds a home, why it lives where it does.

Karl: (to group) The eagle lives in mountains because it needs a whole lot of space to fly. I'm telling the truth. It needs tall trees to build its nest. The reason it lives near water is so that it can drink the water.

The other children look on as Karl shows his labeled diagram of an eagle. The girls begin to contend for control of the group again. Ana announces it is her turn. She reads her page of notes verbatim, not looking at her teammates. Ana continues to read although nobody is listening to her.

Sharon: (to Ana) You're supposed to explain…
Nakata: (to Ana) It's too long. It's wasting time.

Mrs. Peter then presents the team with a large piece of paper and some markers to create their concept web for "habitat." Each student fights for some space as she draws a line from the center of the web and writes about her own bird. There does not appear to be much sharing or exchange of ideas. The finished product resembles a wagon wheel—a cog in the center labeled "habitat" and separate spokes where each child has written a fact about the bird they know most about. The facts are quite accurate in isolation, but there is no obvious, meaningful connection that binds them to the larger concept of habitat.

These two classroom examples can be contrasted in two ways. First, the collaborative processes were more well developed in Mrs. Muttis's class than in Mrs. Peter's class. Mrs. Muttis's team was taking turns, encouraging each other, checking its information, discussing the meaning of its criterion (amazing facts), and trying to develop explanations that were acceptable to the group. At the same time, this team developed a higher form of conceptual knowledge. Although the science principles were not exceptionally complex, and the basic principle (of amazing facts) was not central to biological science, the group developed a set of facts, relations, and explanations. This knowledge structure was more elaborate than the concepts developed in Mrs. Peter's team, which had an array of facts that were not connected or explained. Our theoretical expectation is that a higher level of collaboration will yield a higher level of conceptual knowledge.

How Do Idea Circles Help Students?

Idea circles demand organization by the teacher and cooperation of the students. Time is required to organize the idea circles, and it should be recognized that the time students spend in discussion encroaches on the time traditionally allocated for directly reading texts. In view of these costs, what are the benefits of idea circles for students? Although extensive research is needed to test our expectations, we can present our best estimates about the potential roles of idea circles in learning. We expect that when students engage in a more sophisticated level of collaboration, they may have more opportunities to gain literacy strategies, conceptual understanding, collaborative processes and intrinsic motivation.

Literacy Strategies

The views in this chapter were based on our experience in the integrated curriculum of Concept-Oriented Reading Instruction (CORI). Perhaps the most fundamental form of literacy development that is enhanced by idea circles is strategy learning. When students work as a team to learn from multiple texts, they gain a variety of reading strategies. One of the most prominent strategies is searching for information. Students become comfortable using a wide variety of books. In searching books for information they learn to detect the most important and relevant details. Judging what is vital is a complex process. Many students get lost initially, but through experience and explicit instruction they gain the ability to have their reading more fully guided by their own goals. A second set of strategies relate to text comprehension, including use of background knowledge, understanding word meanings in context, and summarizing significant units of text. The third process emphasized in the CORI program is integration. Students learn to combine information newly encountered in text with what the other students are finding. Analogous to Webb's (1989) findings in math learning, we expect that students who are most active as participants possess the most well-developed strategies for literacy. The instructional goal is to enhance literacy engagement for all students. Developing the language and cognitive abilities as well as the motivational dispositions for literacy are the priorities of this program. As one CORI teacher noted, "Students learn that reading has a powerful purpose." In idea circles embedded within the CORI curriculum, students learn to see that reading is not merely a technical skill, but that literacy is an avenue for the pursuit of information and the discovery of ideas. They learn that books are reservoirs they can tap for their own purposes.

In many classroom settings, the strategies of searching, comprehending, and integrating are often taught individually. In idea circles, however, these strategies must be coordinated. Students learn to call on different strategies as required by the immediate task at hand. The strategies are used in a conceptual context, and the context determines when they are useful and how they may be applied. This process has been called situated learning by some investigators (Rogoff, 1990). Putting strategies to work for practical purposes enables students to adapt them to different kinds of text. They learn to tailor strategies to different topics and, ultimately, to apply strategies extensively outside of the immediate learning context. Idea circles are a context in which literacy strategies are practiced and custom-tailored to personal needs.

CONCEPTUAL UNDERSTANDING

In idea circles, students are most keenly aware of the concept they are learning. A group learning about rivers devotes the most discussion time to facts and functions of rivers. Although students may use reading strategies and writing techniques, they are less likely to discuss these techniques than to debate the topic under investigation. Strategies that students find to be most helpful in learning about the concept are exercised within the context of the debate. Because of the centrality of the concept, teachers should choose concepts carefully. The central topic should be interesting, explanatory, and expansive. For example, rivers are part of the ecology which can lead to discussion of water cycle and pollution. Rivers may seem innocent, but the topic can lead to larger questions of environmental science. Our research shows that children learn concepts readily within the context of idea circles, coming to know the topic well enough to compose drawings, charts, or paragraphs, and to teach other students about their new found expertise (Guthrie, Ng, McCann, Van Meter, & Alao, 1994).

Students need to learn that ideas can be applied to new situations. Idea circles seem to enable students to gain transferrable knowledge and solve problems because the students have seen information being combined and integrated. As different members contribute facts and challenge explanations, they learn that information can be viewed from different perspectives. Therefore, when students are expected to challenge their peers and defend their own explanations, they acquire a more flexible conceptual understanding than they do in isolated learning contexts.

> ***“When students are expected to challenge their peers and defend their own explanations, they acquire a more flexible conceptual understanding than they do in isolated learning contexts.”***

Students in Mrs. Schwartz's fifth grade class were concluding a unit on animal adaptations. Students participated in idea circles to invent an animal that could survive in a particular habitat. After the group chose a habitat, each student drew and wrote about their invented creature. One student wrote a description of her animal, illustrating her understanding of how body parts and survival skills were adapted to the environment:

> Hi! I'm "Slapper." I live in the Majive desert. I'm covered with colorful scale which are used for camouflage. My adaptations are sharp teeth, long tail, and sharp claws. To survive in the hot desert climate I use my long tail for fanning myself, and slapping enemies away. I have sharp claws for ripping through flesh. My prey are rabbits, road runners and foxes. I hunt at night because the nights are cool and that helps me run fast. I have my babies during the spring at night. I live underground in a great big hole. I eat up to 500 lb. of food/prey a day! I have 6–10 babies at a time. When there is a drought I drink water from cactuses.

This sample of expository writing illustrates one student's conceptual knowledge. Through particular characteristics, such as camouflage for defense and sharp teeth for predation, she communicated the major themes of defense, feeding, shelter, and reproduction of her invented animal within the biome of the desert. Her portrait of Slapper showed animal-plant-biome relationships. Her description was not simply a listing of facts; she portrayed a flexible, biological system. Her successful invention illustrated that she could apply the principles of adaptation to a new situation. She succeeded in transferring knowledge from the learning situation to a problem posed by the teacher.

This extension of knowledge to a new context is a property of deep conceptual understanding (Novak & Musonda, 1991).

COLLABORATIVE PROCESSES

Idea circles are social. As a cluster of students bands together to build an understanding, they become aware that knowing is not isolated in one student's head. Learning is a product of social activity, which itself requires some experience and learning. Students begin to acquire social expertise when they learn that it is beneficial to rely on and interact with peers. For example, one teacher asked a student, "Did you understand the passages you read last night for homework?" The student replied, "I won't know until I talk about it with my partner." The student was aware that social construction of knowledge is a powerful process.

From our initial observations, there are several basic collaborative processes in idea circles. The first is *turn-taking*. Becoming a team member can be a complicated journey. Members of a well-functioning team must respect one another. The very process of taking turns implies respect for others and recognition of the group as a unit for academic activity. The act of turn-taking also implies responsibility as a contributor. Each team member is expected to speak as well as listen, and to lead as well as to follow. However, participating in a group is more complex than simple turn-taking.

Another collaborative process consists of *maintaining participation* of members. Because idea circles operate on distributed expertise, everyone can make a contribution. The classroom example from Mrs. Muttis's class included a gifted and talented student, a student with average ability, a low achiever who had been retained for one year, a boisterous extrovert, and a newcomer to the school. However, considerable group effort was required to maintain and balance the participation of the diverse members. This maintenance process included attending to the person who is speaking, keeping pace with the group work, responding to requests from the leader, not disturbing other students, and enjoying humor, while keeping it in bounds. Maintaining full participation enables members to feel that their ideas count in the group, and it sustains the sense of interdependence among individuals.

> *"Idea circles serve as a socially driven vehicle for the purpose of learning a concept."*

Idea circles serve as a socially driven vehicle for the purpose of learning a concept. The group is committed to a goal of conceptual learning. In the form of a question or topic descriptor such as birds' adaptations, the goal is what focuses the students' discourse. To move toward this goal, the group monitors knowledge growth. As individuals give information to the group, other members build on this information. Facts are offered, but facts are also challenged for their accuracy and relevance. Most importantly, students press each other to move beyond facts and toward relationships and explanations. As the group seeks to organize its ideas, members monitor their collective knowledge growth. Akin to self-monitoring during reading comprehension, the group checks and regulates its progress toward the conceptual knowledge goal.

When students are familiar with one another and comfortable in the theme they are studying, they engage in the collaborative process of coaching literacy strategies. Students help each other find information in books. They guide each other in filling out charts or building concept webs. They debate about how to compose paragraphs and how to draw and label pictures. In the extreme case, a student may model all of the processes needed to undertake a complete project for a slower learner. Because students are invested in learning the concepts in the thematic unit, the coaching of literacy strategies is mutually advantageous. The student-as-learner gains strategies, and the student-as-teacher gains a new strategic awareness.

When students in an idea circle finish their work, they collaborate to acknowledge accomplishments. Proudly saying that "I'm done now" conveys a sense of goal fulfillment. Noticing another student's work by commenting "that's good" acknowledges the accomplishment of a peer. These social interchanges provide a collective sense of completion. The conceptual goal has been met, and the social dynamics have enabled the conceptual effort to be fruitful. As students acknowledge their accomplishments, they gain a new perspective on the work of the idea circle. We expect that the more fully these collaborative processes are incorporated into group interactions, the more that conceptual knowledge will be learned and literacy strategies will be used. These collaborative processes are inherent in culturally-relevant literacy activities (Gee, 1992). Importing them into the classroom is likely to enhance the enculturation of students into our literate society.

MOTIVATIONS FOR LITERACY

Idea circles help students develop their intrinsic motivations. All students have curiosities about specific topics, desire for involvement in interesting activities, and a need to feel connected to a group (Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, & Ryan. 1991). These motivations can be supported in idea circles. As students become aware that their personal interests and curiosities can be met through group work, their intrinsic motivations increase. Their curiosities are satisfied through new learning and supported by other members of the group as they gain confidence in themselves. In the idea circles, students are able to fulfill their motivational needs because they are surrounded by allies. Other students can help them surmount the hurdles

> ***"Idea circles help students develop their intrinsic motivations."***

of concept learning or support them in reading and writing. With peers as models and critics, individual group members gain a sense of optimism that they can use to express their interests, fulfill their curiosities, and become invested in an area of learning. Beyond learning, studies show that a social milieu in the classroom fosters the desire to read widely and frequently (Guthrie, Schafer, Wang, & Afflerbach, 1995). Becoming a member of a community where books are shared expands the individual's long-term engagement in literacy.

ORGANIZING IDEA CIRCLES IN A CLASSROOM

If a teacher is trying to set the stage for idea circles, he or she might consider the following guidelines. A few decisions regarding the operation of idea circles must be made before any circles are established. First, consider whether to engage the whole class in idea circles simultaneously or to have one team interact this way while the other children are working quietly on another literacy activity. Watching the dynamics of information exchange in one group might allow teachers to focus on what is working for their students and what needs to be refined. However, it is feasible to run six groups of five or six students each if the whole class is clear about the conceptual goal, information responses, interaction rules, and relation of the idea circle to the other parts of the curriculum.

APPROPRIATE TOPIC

The subject matter in an idea circle deserves special consideration (see Hartman & Allison, this volume, for additional ideas regarding selection of topics of study). The most generative discussions seem to emerge when expertise and specialized knowledge are distributed among members of groups. Choosing a topic that allows this distribution supports a conceptual approach to instruction. We have found that many science concepts contain natural categories and subareas that provide an excellent basis for distributed expertise and idea circles. For example, the concept of animal adaptation could be broken down into discussions of habitat, feeding, breeding and survival skills. These subareas could be the basis for forming groups where students specialize and share their knowledge of a particular animal. Another option is for each member of a team that focuses on birds to take responsibility for learning about one subarea of adaptive behaviors. Teachers should evaluate whether the content they are presenting has the potential to elicit quality discussions from the students, because some content may not be as flexible in this regard. A unit on volcanos would be difficult to break down into idea circles, because of the intimate dependence of the parts of the volcano and how they work. It would not be productive to have students break into groups that had few real differences or categories, such as parts of a volcano. In addition to the conceptual nature of the topic, a deep pool of resources is valuable. Children need to be able to fuel their questions, challenges, and conceptual understanding with evidence of high quality and various approaches to the subject matter. If group members are searching for unique information to contribute, it is vital that each subgroup has equal opportunity to locate information relevant to the idea circle's purpose. If a topic is too narrow or does not have a diverse information base, some members' ability to contribute knowledge could be stifled.

CONCEPTUAL GOAL

The goal of the idea circle should be communicated explicitly. A teacher can provide some prompts to generate discussion if the children are not able to get it going themselves, but eventually, teachers shift control of the group to the students. A semistructured worksheet like the one Mrs. Muttis designed seemed to keep the children on task, while leaving them some freedom to express what they felt was most important about their topic. In Mrs. Peter's example, the children needed help grasping the concept of habitat. Mrs. Peter realized that the concept was not concrete enough for the children. Consequently, she spent more time guiding them to the appropriate questions to discuss.

Teachers must indicate what they expect to accomplish in the allotted time for discussion. The goal may be a single lesson, or a six-day activity. The desired product may be more individually oriented like Mrs. Muttis's amazing facts sheet, or it could be a group product such as Mrs. Peter's concept web. Either way, if the desired end product is articulated well at the beginning of the discussion, less time will be spent arguing over what to do, and more time will be invested in actually doing it.

INFORMATION RESOURCES

It is crucial to have key materials available for the students. A collection of relevant trade books at various levels of difficulty provides the base for information searches and evidence for challenges. Working with more than one information source also increases students' choices of what to research and provides the opportunities for interaction among learners of different reading levels. Students should have read and learned extensively prior to starting the idea circle discussion. It is a good idea to have the students bring notes to the idea circle situation and to make clear the relevance of the notes to the upcoming activity. The richest interactions seem to be generated when the information is distributed among the children. Sometimes it might be necessary to distribute students with good searching strategies, social skills, or particularly deep knowledge across several groups. The heterogeneous quality of teams seems to invite participation from all group members.

INTERACTION RULES

The importance of experience with productive talking and listening skills cannot be underestimated. Prior experience in literature circles seems to transfer well into idea circles if the student-generated interaction rules are posted publicly. It is desirable for the idea circle members to have some history with each other and their respective discussion styles. As we saw in Mrs. Peter's example, it takes time to determine roles with unfamiliar people (for example, who is the leader, who are the followers, and who is the recorder). We suggest developing rules for group discussion with a few students and writing them on chart paper. The chart can be reintroduced at a later session. Old rules can be confirmed and new rules can be added as needed.

PLACEMENT IN CURRICULUM

Essential to the success of idea circles in any classroom is the presence of content that has enough depth to support extended conversations and enough flexibility to allow for the interests and contributions of several students. In a thematic unit of 12 to 16 weeks, the idea circles can be most valuable at the middle (weeks 6–7) and the end (weeks 10–12). At these points students have sufficient familiarity with the topic and one another to be productive in discussion. The possibilities for discussion of generative concepts such as life cycles or earth formations are limitless in an integrated science/language arts curriculum. Within the CORI framework, the children come to the idea circles with a personal investment in a topic and a wealth of background knowledge, making them eager to contribute to the discussion.

With information available, confidence in social interaction skills, and a repertoire of strategies for searching, questioning and proving, children can participate productively in idea circles. As with any new classroom endeavor, time is necessary to work out the inevitable problems that arise. Elevating students to higher levels of discourse that shape each others' knowledge is not an easy process, but the effort is richly rewarded.

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CHAPTER 8

Promoting Inquiry-Oriented Discussions Using Multiple Texts

Douglas K. Hartman and Jeanette Allison

Inquiry-oriented discussions have many historical precedents. Early in this century, the project work of William Heard Kilpatrick (1918) engaged students and teachers in exploratory discussion about topics over extended periods of time. Almost two decades later, the curriculum advocated by the U.S. National Council of Teachers of English described ways in which students and teachers could explore topics from various perspectives across multiple texts (Hatfield, 1935; Weeks, 1936). Also in the 1930s, Teachers College Press published hundreds of booklets that were written by teachers from across the United States who led extended conversations based on texts of all types (for example, MacNeel, 1932).

In the 1970's, Henry (1974) published a book for teachers on how to lead multitext discussions that help students learn to make more complex cross-textual connections. And in this decade, a project sponsored by the U.S. National Reading Research Center examined a year-long classroom discussion where the teacher and students carefully recorded aspects of their discussion and then used the records to reflect on their progress and plan for future discussions (Guthrie, McGough, & Bennett, 1994).

This chapter is an appeal to make inquiry-oriented discussions a more integral part of classroom practice. We begin with background information and a brief rationale. In the heart of the chapter, we explain the concepts and practices that are central to creating inquiry-oriented discussions. Finally, we provide suggestions for getting started and address questions often raised by those who start these discussions in their classroom.

BACKGROUND

We begin our look at inquiry-oriented discussions by identifying five features that make them distinct from other types of discussion.

1. *The discussions are based on multiple texts.* Students may have 5, 10, 20, or more texts related to a topic in front of them while talking. The texts are sorted and re-sorted

into clusters where ideas, illustrations, and images in one text are placed next to those in another text so that comparisons can be made, and texts are passed around so that students can see for themselves if a discussion point is well justified.

2. *The discussions are focused on making connections among the multiple texts.* Although talk about a single text does occur, most of the discussion is about how pairs, trios, or larger clusters of texts relate to one another and to a central topic. Connections about how characters, events, ideas, themes, and motifs relate across texts are presented, refined, combined with new ideas, and discarded.

3. *The discussions extend over many days, weeks, and possibly months.* Because aspects of a topic are revisited on a number of occasions, the teacher and students develop a shared history of how one another's ideas have developed and changed over time. They often talk about what they used to think about a topic compared to their present thinking after reading and hearing more on the topic.

4. *Written records of the discussions are made.* These records are often made in learning logs or on large sheets of paper. Because the discussion of a topic can be spread over long periods of time, these records serve as important reminders of what was discussed and what remains to be discussed.

5. *The discussions are exploratory in nature.* The talk is riddled with false starts, lulls, ramblings, and overlapping speech, as well as clever words, profound insights, lucid thinking, and honest appraisals. Because students are part of a community where they see one another at their best and worst, they know the risks associated with trying to understand new ideas, and, therefore, they take great pains to support and celebrate fledgling attempts and major breakthroughs.

Given that inquiry-oriented discussion has a century-long legacy, one would think that it would be a widespread practice in classroom life, but it is not (Wolf, 1988). And given the emphasis on inquiry learning by the whole language movement, one might think that this type of discussion would have a visible presence in the professional literature; however, it also does not (Lipson, Valencia, Wixson, & Peters, 1993). In both cases, the evidence to date suggests that discussion in most U.S. classrooms:

- focuses on a single text (Wolf, 1988)
- directs students to make connections within and beyond a text, but not across texts (Akyol, 1994)
- occurs within a single day or several days at the most (O'Flahavan, Hartman, & Pearson, 1988)
- leaves little, if any, record of what has transpired (Wolf, 1988)
- is choreographed in such a way that few missteps are even attempted by students (O'Flahavan, Hartman, & Pearson, 1988).

A handful of scholars have provided reasons why inquiry-oriented types of learning have not made their way into mainstream classroom practices (for example, Brandt, 1993a; Shannon, 1990). Whereas a review of these reasons is beyond the scope of this chapter, in the pages that follow, our focus is on the conceptual and practical matters that have impeded the widespread use of inquiry-oriented discussions. Although we acknowledge that what happens in classrooms is constrained by political, cultural, and economic forces, we also realize that the quality of what occurs within these parameters is largely a matter of how conceptual and practical matters are executed. Therefore, our purpose in the remainder of the chapter is to take a new look at these matters. In doing so, our thinking is informed by the research on inquiry learning (see Brandt, 1993b; Hartman, J.A., 1993 for reviews of this research), recent work on intertextuality (see Bloome & Egan-Robertson, 1993; Hartman, D.K., 1992, 1995, for reviews of this research), and our experiences using inquiry-oriented discussions in classrooms.

This new look at inquiry-oriented discussions is motivated by the continued call of educators and researchers to teach for understanding and to prepare students to use complex thinking within and beyond the school's walls (Drucker, 1994; Fowler, 1994; Sizer, 1984). The most recent of these calls, which is informed by the last two decades of research, highlights the fact that most students do not develop either a good understanding of what they are learning or a disposition for a lifetime of learning (Gardner, 1991). Many students have fallen into a pattern of "the correct answer compromise" (Brandt, 1993a, p. 4), which promotes narrow and routine ways of thinking. In response, many reformers have called for a literacy of thoughtfulness and understanding (Brown, 1993, Gardner, 1991; Resnick, 1987, 1990; Sizer, 1984). This more robust kind of literacy goes beyond basic skills and "includes enhanced abilities to think critically and creatively; to reason carefully; to inquire systematically into any important matter; to analyze, synthesize, and evaluate information and arguments; and to communicate effectively to a variety of audiences in a variety of forms" (Brown, 1993, p. xiii). Great thought and care are exercised by teachers and students to achieve this broader and deeper notion of literate understanding. Achieving it is not easy; it requires sustained focus on a number of elements that help create a classroom culture where inquiry-oriented discussions can flourish (Brandt, 1994; Cairney, 1990, 1992; Lehr, 1991; Pogrow, 1994).

CREATING A CLASSROOM CULTURE FOR INQUIRY-ORIENTED DISCUSSIONS

A number of concepts and practices are central to creating a classroom environment where inquiry-oriented discussions can take place. We discuss nine of these conceptual and practical elements by drawing upon previous research, our own experiences, and the experiences of others. These elements are selecting topics, selecting texts, arranging texts, designing activities, developing questions, managing texts, managing talk, documenting learning, and evaluating learning.

SELECTING TOPICS

The first, and probably most important, element is selecting a topic. We define topic in a broad sense as the focus of inquiry, whether that focus is on a problem, question, person, idea, historical period, theme, or event. Because some topics are better suited to inquiry-oriented discussions than others, there are a number of important characteristics of relevant topics to be considered when deciding which type of topic to choose (Dearden, 1983; Hartman & Eckerty, 1995; Katz & Chard, 1993; Perkins & Blythe, 1994). There are at least five characteristics of relevant topics that should guide topic selection:

1. A *concept-driven topic* is one that is linked to a larger concept. This larger concept is usually a generalization for a class of objects, people, animals, events, or other phenomena. Examples of these generalized, higher level concepts are: change, patterns, revolution, folk tales, unrequited love, or genre. Because these concepts are often uninteresting and inaccessible to students in their abstract form, they are usually tied to something more specific.

2. A *generative topic* is one that lends itself well to growth and development across time. It provides continuity to the discussions. This continuous quality means that the topic is directional in nature, and that it continues forward, gathering momentum and engaging students in the flow of discovery. A generative topic is inclined to outgrow its initial boundaries and often leads to logical and coherent growth in understanding.

3. A *complex topic* is multifaceted and can be investigated from many perspectives and at many levels. It can be connected to other topics within and across subject areas. It consists of many elaborate, interconnected parts that require sustained thought to untangle and understand. A complex topic has many layers and dimensions, giving it depth so that it can be revisited a number of times in various ways across grades, with each visit evoking curiosity, intrigue, and wonder.

4. A *useful topic* is one that is immediately relevant and applicable to the lives of students. Some topics have high momentary appeal, but in the long run may not be useful or relevant to students. Topics that inform both present and future understanding are usually considered to be of high utility because students can draw upon them in later learning, both in and out of school.

5. An *accessible topic* is one that is within the conceptual and physical reach of students. Accessible topics place inquiry "right there" for children who can draw directly on personal experience and real phenomena to assist them in making sense of the topic under discussion. By starting discussions on topics that are immediately accessible to children, teachers can extend children's knowledge beyond immediate ideas to more abstract ideas.

To make our discussion of topic categories more concrete, we will contrast two illustrative topics: "The Desert Ecosystem" and "Dinosaurs." These two topics will also show how essential it is to think about the issues with a specific group of students and place in mind. These two illustrative topics are discussed in terms of a second grade suburban elementary classroom in Phoenix, Arizona. By applying the five topic characteristics in this context, we will consider the potential each category has for inquiry-oriented discussions.

As a *concept-driven topic*, "The Desert Ecosystem" focuses on a specific instance (the desert) of a larger concept (ecosystems). Because this topic is highly concept-driven, what is learned about the ecosystem in the desert can be used to study other ecosystems (like those in the rain forest, prairie, and ocean). In contrast, "Dinosaurs" by itself is a specific instance that is not linked to a larger concept. The topic could be made more concept-driven by linking it to a higher level idea like "extinction" which would change the focus to "Dinosaur Extinction," or to the study of other extinct or nearly extinct animals.

As a *generative topic*, "The Desert Ecosystem" can lead in many directions and can piggy back onto related topics like "The Rain Forest Ecosystem," "The Prairie Ecosystem," and "The Ocean Ecosystem." "Dinosaurs," on the other hand, is a much less generative topic because there are fewer substantive directions to move in, thereby limiting its potential for studying future animal topics. "Dinosaurs" could be made more generative by relating it to a higher level concept such as "extinction" to create a topic such as "Dinosaur Extinction," which would give direction to the study of dinosaurs and move the topic beyond its initial boundaries to the study of other extinct animals.

As a *complex topic*, "The Desert Ecosystem" offers the potential for discussing related subject areas, delving into interconnected parts of the ecosystem, and studying aspects of a desert system outside the city limits of Phoenix. Conversely, although "Dinosaurs" is a fairly complex topic, it does not have much potential for student elaboration. The topic could be made more complex by linking it to a higher level concept like "extinction," where the focus is on understanding the causes and dilemmas of animal survival and extinction and on finding solutions to complex problems.

As a *useful topic*, "Desert Ecosystem" provides students with understandings that can be applied to other areas, whether it be the study of other desert regions in later grades or the impact of Phoenix suburban growth on the desert ecosystem. In contrast, "Dinosaurs" does not inform students' present and future lives because the opportunity to apply knowledge is more limited. To make the topic more useful, it should be raised to a higher concept level like "The Extinction of Animals Past and Present," thereby providing knowledge that could affect individual, classroom, or community political action.

As an *accessible topic*, "The Desert Ecosystem" connects students to local resources. Students can investigate the desert, touch objects, talk with people involved with desert preservation, and draw upon personal encounters with the desert. Because the desert is accessible, students are able to extend the topic on their own. In contrast, "Dinosaurs" is much less accessible. Vicarious experiences may be substituted for real access but cannot do justice to actually being there. Making the topic more accessible is best accomplished by first focusing on dinosaurs that once lived in the local area and then by shifting the topic to "Extinct Southwestern Dinosaurs."

These topic characteristics are intended to be guideposts for selecting appropriate types of topics. They provide direction for how to expand topics for inquiry-oriented discussions. As a result, some topics may represent only qualities of some of the categories. Whether these categories guide teachers as they preplan a district mandated topic or inform students who are self-selecting topics to investigate, the substance and pleasure of conducting the inquiry-oriented discussions that follow is immeasurably enhanced by thoughtfully using these different types of topics.

SELECTING TEXTS

Teachers must use a broad definition of text when selecting from a wide variety of text types, so that students will have a rich set of resources from which to draw in their inquiry. Typically, a text is defined as an experience or idea communicated in print, such as a textbook, a chapter, or a passage. Although these kinds of text are the most common and familiar uses of this term, a text does not have to be confined to the boundaries of a printed page. A much broader definition of the word *text* is anything that communicates meaning (Rowe, 1987; Siegel, 1984).

For the purposes of inquiry-oriented discussions, it is helpful to think of texts as ranging from *linguistic* to *semiotic* (Hartman, D.K., & Hartman, J.A. 1993). Linguistic texts include written materials such as stories, chapters, articles, poems, and essays. Semiotic texts include film, video, drama, dance, music, photography, painting, gestures, oral styles, and many other types of signs. In a broader sense, students can construct meaning by reading linguistic as well as semiotic textual resources.

There are two advantages to adopting this broad concept of text types. First, it expands the number of opportunities students have for exploring a particular topic in a discussion. Second, it supports the more multimedia and multimodal learning experiences that students are exposed to in their learning outside of school. Taken together, these advantages place a high value on the full range of text types available to students.

> ***"A text does not have to be confined to the boundaries of a printed page."***

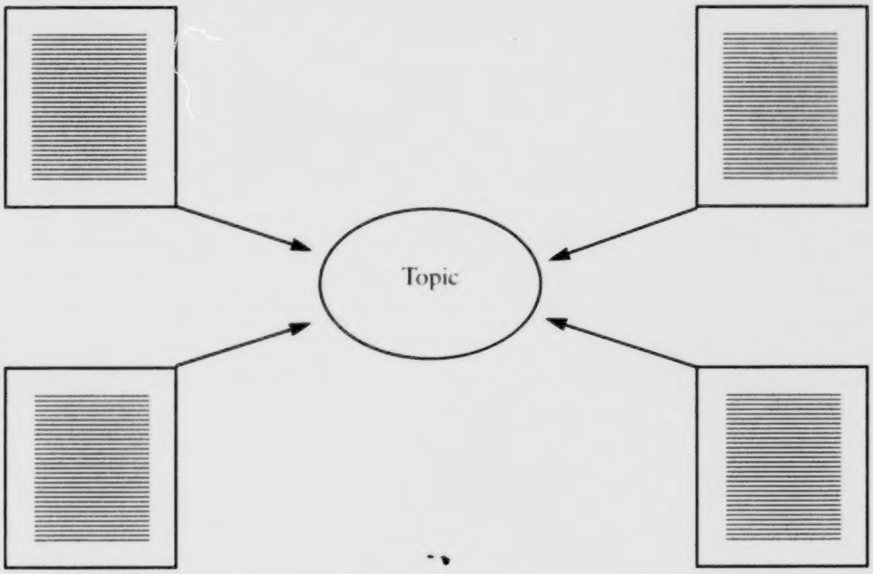
Identifying linguistic and semiotic texts on a particular topic is often a time-consuming and frustrating process, whether the teacher or students assume the responsibility for selecting texts. We have found a number of resources helpful in streamlining the search process (see Hartman, D.K. & Hartman, J.A. 1993, 1994). We have also found the expertise of librarians and colleagues to be invaluable for locating additional texts. Finally, the Internet and on-line services offer an increasingly important means of locating texts.

ARRANGING TEXTS

Preparing for inquiry-oriented discussions requires thinking about how to arrange the selected texts. The goal here is to arrange texts so that they contribute to a rich set of exploratory and integrative discussion experiences for students. Although there are no set rules for creating sets of texts that facilitate discussions, we have identified a number of useful ways to think about the underlying relationships among texts (Hartman, D.K., & Hartman, J.A. 1994). These relationships fall into five categories: complementary, conflicting, controlling, synoptic, and dialogic.

Complementary texts enhance and support a topic, and provide students with varied and repeated opportunities to see the multifaceted nature of that topic (see Figure 1). For example, the topic of "Number Sense" can be explored through a set of complementary texts that give a feel for large numbers: Gág's storybook *Millions of Cats* (1963),

Figure 1
Graphic representation of relations in a *complementary* set of texts.

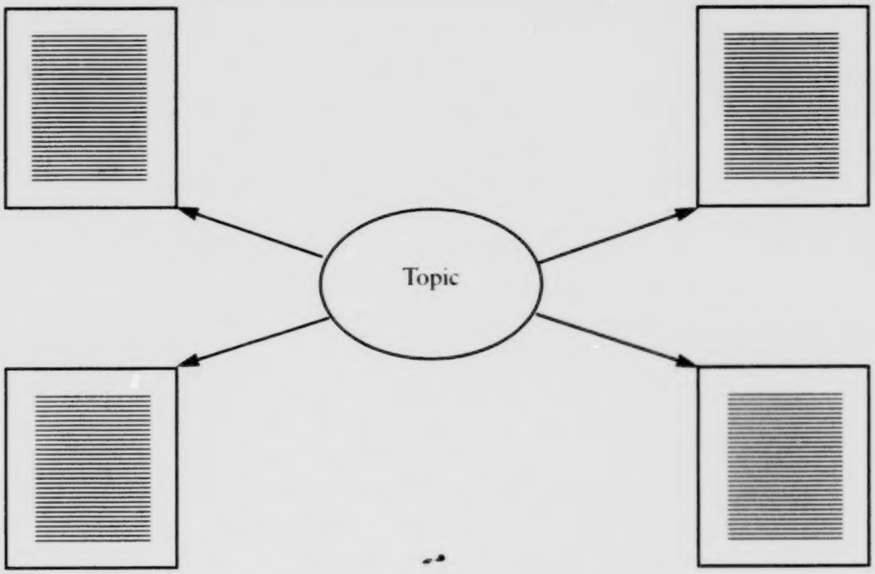


an information book titled *How Much Is a Million?* (Schwartz, 1985), an information article of the same title (Goins, 1975), a historical account of how large numbers developed in *The Story of Numbers* (Lauber, 1961), and a book filled with one million dots (Hertzberg, 1970) provide students with many opportunities to construct, reconstruct, and synthesize information from multiple sources.

Conflicting texts provide alternative, problematic, and disruptive perspectives on a topic (see Figure 2). They bring competing viewpoints to center stage for students. For example, the topic "What Really Happened in History?" can be explored through conflicting accounts of the death of General James Wolfe at the battle of Quebec in September 1759 during the French and Indian War. These might include: the event as mentioned in a social studies textbook (Hirsh, 1988), as described in a children's periodical (Collins, 1991), as painted by West (1770), as discussed in trade books (Henty, 1961; Marrin, 1987; Ochoa, 1990), and as retold by a historian (Schama, 1991).

A *controlling* text provides a frame for the reading of other texts. This arrangement gives students the opportunity to use one text as a strategic device or authoritative expression for developing understandings of another (see Figure 3). For example, the topic of "Needing to Belong" in MacLachlan's (1985) book *Sarah, Plain and Tall* can be

Figure 2
Graphic representation of relations in a *conflicting* set of texts.



used as the controlling lens through which to read subsequent texts such as McCord's "This is My Rock" (Cole, 1984), Hughes's "Dreams" (Prelutsky, 1983), "Sumer Is Icumen In" (Caldwell & Kendrick, 1984), and *Maniac Magee* (Spinelli, 1990).

Synoptic texts highlight the versions and variants of a single story or event. This provides students with the opportunity to see how a story is refracted through different lenses, including social, cultural structural, medium, and historical (see Figure 4). For example, the topic of "Diversity Around the World" can be explored through a set of synoptic texts that focus on how fairy tales like *Cinderella* are rendered across various cultures. Students can read the linguistic versions of *Yeh-shen* (China) (Ai-ling, 1982), *Princess Furball* (Germany) (Huck, 1989), *Vasilisa the Beautiful* (Russia) (Whitney, 1970), *Moss Gown* (Southern U.S.) (Hooks, 1987), and *Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters* (Africa) (Steptoe, 1987), as well as the semiotic texts of Rogers and Hammerstein's

Figure 3
Graphic representation of relations in a *controlling* set of texts.

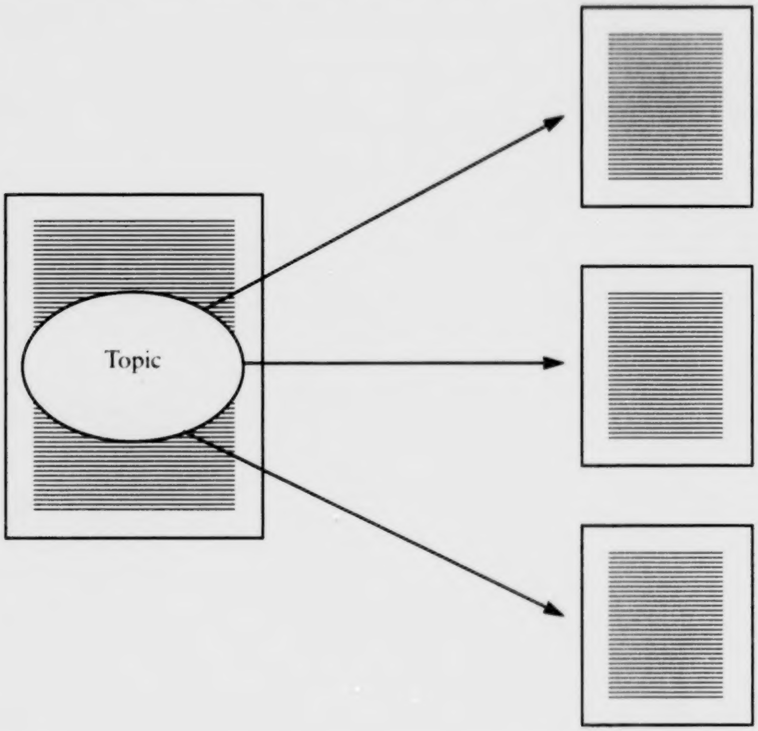
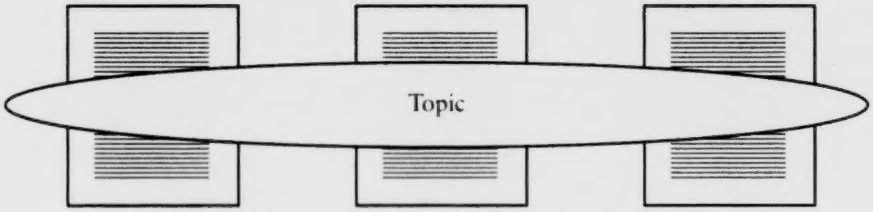


Figure 4
Graphic representation of relations in a *synoptic* set of texts.



(1964) musical production, *The Berlin Comic Opera*'s (Bey & Gawlick, 1986) dance interpretation, and the illustrations in the versions mentioned previously.

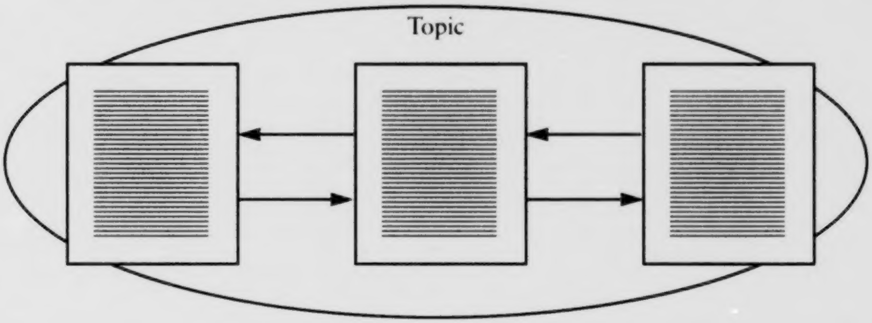
And finally, *dialogic* texts present an ongoing interchange or "dialogue" on a topic. Such an arrangement provides students with a textual conversation where characters or people, themes, and events appear and reappear across many texts (see Figure 5). Sendak's trilogy *Where the Wild Things Are* (1963), *In the Night Kitchen* (1970), and *Outside Over There* (1981) provide an example of how interactions around the topic of "Dealing with Hardship" are exchanged and reworked across the texts.

Regardless of how texts of various types are arranged, the primary concern should be with how a cluster of texts can promote student inquiry learning. As a teacher might expect, some collections of texts will lend themselves better to inquiry learning than others. It is necessary to persist and explore the many ways texts complement and challenge the topic to be explored during discussion.

DESIGNING ACTIVITIES

There are many activities that enhance students' efforts to explore and relate multiple texts in inquiry-oriented discussions. It is helpful to think of these activities as ranging from *closed-ended* to *open-ended* (Hartman, D.K. & Hartman, J.A. 1993; Hartman, J.A., & Hartman, D.K. 1994). Closed-ended activities specifically define the direction of inquiry, thereby focusing the reading across texts on a particular aspect or purpose. For the topic "Exaggeration and Reality in Media," where versions of *Jack and the Beanstalk* are read (e.g., Cauley, 1983; De Regniers, 1987; Gruenberg, 1933; Harris, 1807/1974; Kellogg, 1991), a closed-ended activity limits students to a prescribed set of texts that have been selected in advance by the teacher. The teacher then poses an equally closed-ended question such as, "Why did Jack go up the beanstalk for the third time?" *before* students

Figure 5
Graphic representation of relations in a *dialogic* set of texts.



make their way through the three versions of the story. By preselecting the texts to be read and posing such a question beforehand, the range of discussion is limited.

In contrast, open-ended activities less specifically define the initial texts to be read and the direction of the discussion. These activities are intended to help students engage in inquiry on their own terms with minimal direction from the teacher. As students progress in their inquiry, however, the teacher may want to help them decide on central concepts to be studied. After students have explored these central concepts, they can then return to a broadened focus that encompasses other related ideas. An open-ended activity that uses the same *Jack and the Beanstalk* versions would direct students to explore the similarities and differences among the texts for their own purposes, and then to read beyond them for additional texts of their own choosing that relate to their emerging understandings and responses. For example, students might discover related texts about how other giants have been depicted in fairy tales (Adams & Atchinson, 1926; Naden, 1979), other characters' reactions when they encountered beanstalks (Briggs, 1970), and how real bean plants grow and function in man-made and natural environments (Black & Huxley, 1985; *Children's Britannica*, 1988). By encouraging students to read beyond the starter texts and to engage in learning for their own purposes, a much broader range of potential connections is possible.

> ***"Open-ended activities are intended to help students engage in inquiry on their own terms with minimal direction from the teacher."***

On a cautionary note, when students first begin to use texts in more open-ended activities, they often are inclined to look for connections between texts that are sanctioned by the teacher. Students should be encouraged to look for their own links between texts, to make judgments about what is relevant to connect, and to synthesize information in ways that makes sense to them. Teachers will see learning as a more open, ongoing construction of meanings across texts as they give students more responsibility in the inquiry process.

DEVELOPING QUESTIONS

Questions have long been used to develop and assess students' understanding of a topic. However, research on the types of questions used most often in elementary classrooms indicates that whether developing or assessing comprehension, teachers' questions largely direct students to make connections *within* and *beyond* a single text but not *across* texts (O'Flahavan, Hartman, & Pearson, 1988). These cross-textual questions, absent in most classroom discussions, give inquiry-oriented discussions their texture, richness, and direction. To address the absence of these question types, Akyol (1994) and Hartman, D.K. (1991) developed a scheme that divides questions into three types:

- *Intratextual* questions prompt students to recall or connect information *within* a single text. These questions ask students to produce answers that can be found explicitly in the text or inferred by connecting information from several sentences or paragraphs within a text.
- *Intertextual* questions prompt students to connect information from *across* two or more texts. These questions ask students to connect information from several texts that have been read for the discussion or for purposes outside the discussion.
- *Extratextual* questions prompt students to connect ideas from *beyond* the text to information in the text. These questions direct students to connect their background knowledge with information in the text or to recall information solely from their background knowledge (See Table 1).

Should these question types be used in any particular progression? We have observed a consistent pattern in the progression we have used with these three question types: Start with intratextual questions, move on to extratextual questions (if necessary), and then expand to intertextual questions. This progression has been effective when students are not familiar with the process of inquiry-oriented discussions, are younger developmentally, or are bogged down momentarily in how to connect texts. For example:

- When students are less familiar with the process of inquiring, discussing, and connecting across texts, it may be helpful to start with intratextual questions, proceed to extratextual questions, and then expand to intertextual questions. On the other hand, when students are more familiar with these processes they may

Table 1
Question types for inquiry-oriented discussion: Intratextual, intertextual, and extratextual.

Question type	Purpose	Focus	Example
Intratextual	To recognize, recall, or connect information *within* a single text.	A question that prompts students to answer by: • recognizing or recalling information that is explicitly stated within a single text. • connecting information from several sentences or paragraphs within a single text.	• "What is the name of the main character?" • "How do the author's views of the desert ecosystem change from the beginning, to the middle, to the end of the book?"
Intertextual	To connect information *across* two or more texts.	A question that prompts students to answer by: • connecting information across several texts that are part of the discussion. • connecting information across several texts that are part of and outside the discussion.	• "How are the problems in all three stories alike or different?" • "How have the science texts you read on the spotted owl helped you understand this essay on dinosaur extinction?"
Extratextual	To connect ideas from *beyond* the text(s) to information in the text(s).	A question that prompts students to answer by: • connecting information from the text(s) and information from background knowledge. • recalling or constructing information from background knowledge.	• "What do you know now about how shoes are made compared to what you used to know?" • "What do you know about how rain forests work?"

be able to engage immediately in intertextual questions, with intra- and extratextual questions augmenting the discussion over time.

- When students are developmentally younger they may need to start with intra- and extratextual questions before proceeding to intertextual questions. In contrast, older students may be able to engage sooner with intertextual questions.
- When students are temporarily stuck on how to connect texts to better understand a topic, their thinking can be improved by asking intra- and extratextual questions that spur their identification of information from text and experience. This can be followed by intertextual questions that direct students to relate information across texts to a more thoughtful understanding of the topic. Overall, an intimate understanding of what students know and can do should guide which question types are used and when.

Although all three question types have a place in inquiry-oriented discussions, intertextual questions should have a special prominence because their focus is on connecting information from multiple texts to develop a thoughtful understanding of the topic. Conceiving of and asking intertextual questions requires a type of thinking that has not received widespread attention to date. By piecing together the work of others, we have developed a simple scheme for composing intertextual questions of various types (Bartholomae & Petrosky, 1987; Hatfield, 1935; Henry, 1974; Moss, 1984):

- *Correlation* questions prompt students to contrast information across texts to understand how aspects in each of the texts are similar or different. The focus is on contrasting ideas, facts, or textual elements by doing analytic comparisons (for example, characters, settings, events, problems). An example of a correlation question is: "What are the similarities and differences among the creation myths we have been reading?"
- *Fusion* questions prompt students to combine information across texts using an external element to achieve a more complete understanding. The focus is on how this external element—whether it be the topic or another text—can serve as a frame or lens for revealing new perspectives on the topic. An example of a fusion question is: "Is there something in one text that helps you better understand the topic as presented in the other text(s)?"
- *Integration* questions prompt students to connect information across texts in ways that create new ideas. By generating new insights about the topic that are not presented in any of the texts, ideas can be constructed by imaginatively melding different aspects together. An example of an integration question is: "Having read these texts, what new thought or insight do you come to that is not in any of the texts?"

Whether these types of questions are posed before students read a set of texts (as in a more closed-ended activity) or when a teacher poses an impromptu question to help direct an inquiry students are already pursuing (as in a more open-ended activity), the emphasis should be on directing students to correlate, fuse, and integrate information from multiple sources in their discussions (see Commeyras, Sherrill & Wuenker, this volume).

MANAGING TEXTS

To manage texts during inquiry-oriented discussions have plenty of space to lay out texts. A large table or an open section of the classroom floor work well. Position the texts so that they can be seen, pointed at, and moved about during the discussion. The whole class or a small working group of students can then sit in a circle around the texts.

Have students manually sort and categorize texts during the discussion. While there are a number of ways for students to manipulate texts, two practices should be a part of whichever way is used. One practice is to encourage students to sort texts into piles, clusters, pairs, or columns and rows *as they talk* (Short, 1992a). These concrete manipulations of textual material help make visible, experiential, social, and conceptually relevant connections among sources. Another practice is to ask the student who has control of the discussion floor at a given moment to move the texts around. There is a minimum of delay, misunderstanding, and distraction if control is placed directly in the hands of the student who is speaking. Consequently, discussion moves along at a lively pace.

MANAGING TALK

While there are many items to consider when leading a discussion (see chapters by Guthrie & McCann; Leal; McGee; McMahon; and Wiencek, this volume), three items are distinct to managing talk during inquiry-oriented discussions. One is the recognition of two overlapping phases to inquiry-oriented discussions. The first phase is an exploratory phase, where many ideas are mentioned but not explored in depth. Rather than focusing on any type of sustained dialogue on the topic, the talk zig-zags and shifts. This may appear to be unfocused, random talk, but it is an important brainstorming time where initial responses, partial ideas, and false starts are the norm and are put forward as possible candidates for a more focused discussion later. Because this is an important idea incubation period, it is critical that the teacher not intervene in the disjunctured talk by pointing out logical connections or prompting students to focus on one idea at a time. Giving in to the temptation to direct this "ideating" or "mucking around" time in the name of having a more productive discussion squelches the potential for a more focused discussion later that reflects inventive, thoughtful understandings (Short, 1992b;

Smith, Goodman, & Meredith, 1970). This exploratory phase is for students to explore and make public their rough-draft ideas, giving them a sense of possibilities.

The second phase involves the much more focused task of shaping, reworking, and refining ideas. It is the talk in this more focused discussion that creates moments of powerful insight and late afternoon discoveries. The shift from exploratory to focused discussion evolves slowly and may take some prompting by the teacher to move things along at critical junctures. As students begin to sift through their initial ideas, a few more ideas will emerge as those that are worth exploring in more depth. The discussion then focuses on the development of those ideas.

> ***"It is critical that the teacher not intervene in and smooth over the disjunctured talk by pointing out logical connections or prompting students to focus on one idea at a time."***

Another distinct item of inquiry-oriented discussions is the record of the daily discussion. Daily discussion sketches should be recorded in a sequence that gives a sense of fluidity to the ideas explored, texts used and reused, and connections made. It is useful to use a roll of butcher paper so that each new panel in the ongoing discussion can be placed next to the previous discussion's record. Each discussion panel is dated, and it can be read as a concept story wall of the evolving discussion. The practice of constructing a daily record of discussion does much to build continuity and coherence into the talk of the multiday discussions.

A final distinction of inquiry-oriented discussions is the establishment of routines that start up and close down daily installments of the longer discussion. One helpful starting routine is to ask one or two students to begin the discussion by reviewing what the group has discovered in preceding discussion sessions. Students usually do this brief review while referring to the sequence of daily discussion panels they have sketched on the butcher paper. The documents or artifacts they produced also can be reviewed. As a closing routine, students spend a few minutes talking about what they have accomplished that day and what they hope to do the next time. (Short, 1992a). These next steps, as well as the time of the next discussion, are then recorded on the butcher paper discussion panel for that day for future reference. This also alerts those students who may need to do outside preparation to what will need to be done and by what deadline. Whether these or other routines are developed, they should have a retrospective (reflective synthesis) and prospective (predictive planning) element that can direct the stream of discussions into a nearly continuous flow of talk. Otherwise, the rich potential of extended, in-depth inquiry-oriented discussions may not be realized (see chapters by Matanzo and Wiencek, this volume, for related discussion of post-discussion debriefings).

DOCUMENTING LEARNING

For evaluation purposes, it is important to consider the products, artifacts, or outcomes students construct to represent their understanding of the topic across texts. Classrooms that narrowly define how students demonstrate their academic ability may produce undesirable effects on learning and socialization (see Rosenholtz & Simpson, 1984). Defining academic ability in broader terms and encouraging students to use a variety of forms to represent their new ideas more effectively accomodates students' various learning and interactional styles.

Any discussion about outcomes should include various ways students can represent their evolving understandings of a topic. Outcomes can be expressed in ways ranging from *unimedium* to *multimedia* (Hartman, D.K., & Hartman, J.A., 1993; Hartman, J.A., & Hartman, D.K., 1994). Unimedium outcomes usually are expressed in isolation and include such activities as talking, singing, writing, or drawing connections. For instance, a student might informally talk with others; write a story, poem, or song; draw, sketch, or paint pictures; or make semantic maps.

Moving toward more multimedia modes of expression involves combining some of these activities, such as writing a report and presenting it to the class, or sketching connections discussed during a small group conference session. Even more involved expression modes encourage students to symbolize their thoughts by enacting or reconstructing connections across texts.

For example, while discussing the topic "Acting Out the Written Word," students can combine many modes of expression. They might enact a play they have written (complete with props, setting, and music) after reading a linguistic textual version of *Peter and the Wolf* (for example, Chappell, 1981), or they might use a version that includes excerpts of the musical score, combined with linguistic text (Voigt, 1980) and with semiotic text. This semiotic text may take the form of a traditional narrated classical recording (Prokofiev, 1984), a more contemporary jazz rendition (Van Ronk, 1990), or a full-length animated film (Disney, 1982).

In addition, students can reconstruct textual connections through the use of projects (Hartman, J.A. 1991; Katz & Chard, 1989). Projects are "in-depth investigations of interest to children that can last from a few days to several months" (Hartman & Eckerty, 1995, p. 143). For example, after reading across such books as *One Day in the Tropical Rain Forest* (George, 1990), *Rain Forest Secrets* (Dorros, 1990), *The Great Kapok Tree* (Cherry, 1990), and *Where the Forest Meets the Sea* (Baker, 1987), as well as articles such as *Tropical Rain Forests: Life at the Maximum* (Batten, 1991), *What's the Difference Between a Rain Forest and Other Forests?* (Fairley, 1990), and *The Nature of the Rainforest* (Crabtree, 1990), students can construct a model of a rain forest in one section of the classroom that synthesizes information from across all the texts.

It is important to note here that multimedia approaches not only accommodate an expanded role of the student but require an accompanying reconceptualization of classroom space and the teacher's role in the classroom. The classroom becomes more than a place where students learn at desks and tables and post their work on the walls. One must envision the classroom as part museum, publishing house, think tank, writers' workshop, artists' studio, theater, drafting room, computer lab, library, bookstore, gallery, recording studio, and more. As a result, the teacher's role becomes that of curator, impresario, editor, futurist, therapist, director, producer, media resource specialist, salesperson, and engineer.

Whether unimedium or multimedia ways of documenting are used, the consistent focus should be on recording the connections being discussed to construct a thoughtful understanding of the topic. One way to do this is to have a big piece of butcher paper under the books to sketch cross-textual connections or groupings being discussed, resulting in a public record of the discussions. Another way to graphically depict connections is for each student to keep a learning log to sketch different configurations of the textual layout, resulting in a personal record of the discussions for later use. Whatever method is used, leaving a paper trail of what transpired during the discussion is important for future reference, whether this information is used to write a report, prepare an oral presentation, or remember where to pick up the discussion from where it left off.

EVALUATING LEARNING

Evaluating students' learning should be based on documentary evidence collected throughout the inquiry-oriented discussions. Our view of how to evaluate this evidence is informed by the work of many scholars (such as Perkins & Blythe, 1994; Valencia, McGinley, & Pearson, 1990). Two types of evaluation be should used. Ongoing evaluation that will inform students' learning and the teacher's instruction (formative evaluation), and terminal evaluation that serves accountability needs (summative evaluation). Both ongoing and terminal evaluation require criteria for judging teaching and learning in the discussions. Process and content criteria are used to evaluate the ongoing and terminal evidence that is collected for inquiry-oriented discussions.

Process criteria focus on how well the discussion is proceeding and how various elements promote or impede that progression. Because the nine elements discussed in this section of the chapter concentrate on promoting or impeding inquiry-oriented discussions, we use them as process criteria. Table 2 presents a list of these elements, followed by questions that focus on the important evaluative aspects of each. Table 2 also presents space to identify the type of evidence that is to be used in answering each question. A rating scale is also provided, ranging from "not well" to "very well" (1 through 5) which can be used in evaluating the degree to which the criteria reflected in the question is visible in the documentary evidence. Finally, Table 2 allows space to indicate any adjustments that need to be made or steps to be taken to improve the discussion as it continues.

Table 2
Process criteria to be used when evaluating inquiry-oriented discussions.

Process criteria	Documentary evidence	Rating[a]	Adjustments/ next steps
Selecting topics			
1. How well does the topic lend itself to the investigative nature of inquiry-oriented discussion?		1 2 3 4 5	
2. How well does the topic fit with the categories concept-driven, generative, complex, useful, and accessible?		1 2 3 4 5	
Selecting texts			
3. How well do the texts provide a rich set of resources from which to draw ideas and information?		1 2 3 4 5	
4. How well do the texts represent a range of text types from linguistic to semiotic?		1 2 3 4 5	
Arranging texts			
5. How well conceived are the underlying relationships among texts?		1 2 3 4 5	
6. How well are the texts arranged to facilitate inquiry discussion?		1 2 3 4 5	
Designing activities			
7. How well do the closed-ended activities promote inquiry in the discussions?		1 2 3 4 5	
8. How well do the open-ended activities promote inquiry in the discussions?		1 2 3 4 5	
Developing questions			
9. How well do the planned questions prompt the connecting of information within, across, and beyond the texts?		1 2 3 4 5	
10. How well do the follow-up and impromptu questions prompt thoughtfulness about the relationships within, across, and beyond the texts?		1 2 3 4 5	
Managing texts			
11. How well is the space made available for sorting texts used?		1 2 3 4 5	
12. How well is the manipulation of texts managed during discussions?		1 2 3 4 5	

(continued)

Table 2

Process criteria to be used when evaluating inquiry-oriented discussions. (cont'd.)

Process criteria	Documentary evidence	Rating[a]	Adjustments/ next steps
Managing talk			
13. How well do the initial discussions allow brainstorming and playful exploration of ideas?		1 2 3 4 5	
14. How well do later discussions become more focused on investigating specific ideas?		1 2 3 4 5	
Documenting learning			
15. How well are discussions documented on large sheets of paper or in learning logs?		1 2 3 4 5	
16. How well do the artifacts used to document learning reflect a balance and variety of evidence types?		1 2 3 4 5	
Evaluating learning			
17. How well do the ongoing and terminal types of evaluation help understand what is learned?		1 2 3 4 5	
18. How well have the criteria been explained and used during the discussions?		1 2 3 4 5	
19. How well has the time set aside been used to reflect on the inquiry process?		1 2 3 4 5	

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[a] The numerals in the rating scale are intended to indicate qualitative gradients of the criteria in the question. Additional characteristics or hallmarks can be developed for each numerical rating. For our purposes, a general scale is sufficient for initial evaluation purposes:
1 = Not Well; 2 = Fairly Well; 3 = Moderately Well; 4 = Well; 5 = Very Well

Content criteria focus on the substance of the discussions, emphasizing the quality of the material that results from the process. Table 3 presents four points along the continuum used to evaluate the complexity of thought and understanding reflected in the content of documentary evidence. The table also provides columns to indicate the type of evidence to which the criteria is applied, the rating arrived at after applying the criteria to the evidence, and any adjustments or steps that need to be taken in future discussions.

Table 3
Content criteria to be used when evaluating inquiry-oriented discussions.

Content criteria	Documentary evidence	Rating[a]	Adjustments/ next steps
Recognition			
1. How well does the student recognize connections that have been used or created in the discussions?		1 2 3 4 5	
Use			
2. How well does the student use connections that have been used or created in the discussions?		1 2 3 4 5	
Creation			
3. How well does the student create original connections to use in the discussions?		1 2 3 4 5	
Application			
4. How well does the student apply connections to the development of novel ideas, original works, or prototypical solutions?		1 2 3 4 5	

[a] The numerals in the rating scale are intended to indicate qualitative gradients of the criteria in the statement. Additional characteristics or hallmarks can be developed for each numerical rating. For our purposes, a general scale is sufficient for initial evaluation purposes:
1 = Not Well; 2 = Fairly Well; 3 = Moderately Well; 4 = Well; 5 = Very Well

Both sets of criteria can be used by the teacher and students for evaluating the discussions. Setting aside time to regularly reflect on all or part of these criteria contributes greatly to the ongoing effectiveness of the discussions (formative evaluation). In addition, to bring closure to many weeks of discussion, a final debriefing should be held (summative evaluation).

The nine elements highlighted in this section focus on the salient features of developing inquiry-oriented discussions in the classroom. The elements are intended as a means, not an end; they are conceptual and practical tools for creating a classroom culture where inquiry-oriented discussions thrive. Of course, other elemental tools such as teacher-student rapport, classroom management skills, and participatory structures also substantively affect the success of any discussion.

GETTING STARTED

In this final section suggestions for beginning inquiry-oriented discussions are provided, and four questions that often surface as teachers initiate the discussions are addressed. We turn first to the suggestions for starting inquiry-oriented discussions.

START-UP SUGGESTIONS

The suggestions that follow are based on one underlying strategy: start small, and expand the conversations over time.

- Start with a teacher-initiated topic or present a few topics to students from which they can choose. Once the teacher and students have a better feel for how various topics work, assist students in assuming more responsibility for topic selection.
- Begin the initial discussions with starter texts that the teacher has selected, and then encourage students to seek additional texts. Emphasize to students that the texts selected by the teacher are intended to get things started, and that they are to seek out other texts that will further the discussion of the topic.
- Use linguistic (written) texts to start the first few discussions, but then expand to more semiotic texts over time. Repeatedly remind students that they can read and learn from many different types of textual resources, and that they should explore beyond conventional print sources. The teacher may need to provide class time for students to locate pictorial, video, and audio resources before they begin to fully recognize the large number of sources available to them.
- Conduct the initial discussions with the teacher leading the students. Over time, help students move to the front with the teacher leading from behind. The teacher should shift from a directing role to a facilitating role.
- Model the process of connecting texts as a way to make sense of the topic. Reading and seriously talking about a large number of texts may be a new school experience for many students, so they will need the teacher to coach them on how to try ideas, change their minds, or disagree with themselves.
- Offer examples of how to graphically depict connections among texts and ideas. This too is also likely to be new territory for most students, so they will need examples to draw on. Start with sketches the teacher has made when investigating a topic on her own.
- Keep a regular focus on the concept related to the topic. Often there is a tendency to talk about the particulars of the topic (desert) but not its related concept (ecosystems). Discussion should direct students to the higher level concept as they inquire about the particular case.

COMMON QUESTIONS

Once inquiry-oriented discussions are underway, several questions commonly arise. Each of these questions grows out of the uncertainties that accompany an exploratory learning approach like inquiry-oriented discussions. We have responded to four of these commonly asked questions.

HOW DO I EXPLAIN TO MY STUDENTS EXACTLY WHAT IT IS WE ARE TRYING TO DO? A simple explanation should be sufficient to help students picture what inquiry-oriented discussions can be like. One way to say this is, "We will be learning about (topic). We will work with many different pieces of information and talk with people who know about our topic. As we learn about (topic), you need to think about how each piece of information relates to another piece of information. So, you will compare how one piece of information is the same as, or different from, another piece of information—how a piece of information fits, or does not fit, with another piece of information. As you work with all of this information and talk with your friends, what you know about this topic will change. That's a good sign. We want to see how our thinking about (topic) grows with each new text we read and talk about."

WHAT IF STUDENTS DO NOT MAKE CONNECTIONS ACROSS TEXTS, OR THEIR DISCUSSIONS ARE NOT INQUIRY-ORIENTED? The absence of cross-textual connections or inquiry-oriented discussions could be due to (a) the topic not adequately meeting the criteria we discussed earlier, (b) the texts not being varied enough, (c) the students needing more prompts from the teacher, or (d) the students not having enough time to work with the information and develop ideas. Once the source(s) of the problem has been identified, reread the relevant section of this chapter for suggestions on how to reanimate the discussions.

WHAT IS THE TEACHER'S MAIN GOAL WHEN DEVELOPING INQUIRY-ORIENTED DISCUSSIONS THAT USE MULTIPLE TEXTS? The main goal of inquiry-oriented discussions is for students to develop a thoughtful understanding of the topic. This understanding is developed by making connections within, across, and beyond texts in the course of group discussion. Students should also learn how to engage in complex thinking that requires them to analyze, evaluate, and synthesize information from many textual sources. Over time, students will be more able to think in this way.

WHERE DO INQUIRY-ORIENTED DISCUSSIONS THAT USE MULTIPLE TEXTS FIT INTO THE CURRICULUM? Exactly where these discussions fit into the curriculum depends on the teacher's and school's goals. If the goals include thinking critically, then the discussions shoul be central to classroom activity and scheduled every day or week. If the goals do not include this type of thinking, then the discussions will probably have to play a less central role, occuring only a few times a month.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, we have made an appeal for making inquiry-oriented discussions a more integral part of classroom practice. This idea is linked to a larger historical movement to promote a literacy of thoughtfulness and understanding. The goal of this new literacy is to develop students who can locate, sift through, analyze, interpret, evaluate, and communicate information from multiple texts to different audiences for different purposes. The means for achieving this goal lies in how well certain fundamental concepts and practices are executed in the classroom. The nine elements discussed in this chapter represent those fundamental concepts and practices and depict a framework for designing, implementing, and evaluating inquiry-oriented discussions. The framework is intended to be descriptive rather than prescriptive, and the accompanying examples are intended to be illustrative rather than exhaustive. By seriously considering the suggestions for inquiry-oriented discussions, educators will develop a literacy of thoughtfulness in the lives of their students.

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CHAPTER 9

Text Talk: Using Discussion to Promote Comprehension of Informational Texts

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Sharing and interacting with others in literature study circles or book talks is a natural outgrowth of real literature in the classroom, and interest in discussion of narrative texts is evidenced throughout this book. Although the use and teaching of literature is profoundly important to literacy learning, children usually find informational texts the most difficult to comprehend (Martin, VanCleaf, & Hodges, 1988; Vacca, Vacca, & Gove, 1991). Informational texts can present readers with a number of challenges that are unique to expository style, such as unfamiliar text structure or a high degree of content background knowledge. Nonetheless, the results of the 1988 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) revealed that many students in the United States are unable to perform higher level reading functions from specialized reading materials (Mullis, Owen, & Phillips, 1991).

Because of children's difficulty comprehending informational texts, textbook assignments are often avoided altogether and, instead, alternative forms of content instruction are provided (such as lecture, films, drama, hands-on activities). Children can benefit from a variety of instructional practices, and these kinds of activities can result in positive educational outcomes. In fact, alternative forms of content instruction can contribute to background knowledge and thereby improve reading comprehension (Gillet & Temple, 1994). However, children also need opportunities to read and glean information from informational texts in order to develop the higher level reading skills that the NAEP recommends and today's workplace demands.

HOW CAN DISCUSSION OF INFORMATIONAL TEXTS BENEFIT CHILDREN?

Within the past 20 years, a new model of the reading process has emerged that has implications for how discussion of informational texts can benefit children. Reading is no longer viewed as a passive activity where the reader merely memorizes content information. The contemporary model of reading views the reader as an active participant who independently uses strategies to construct meaning (Ryder & Graves, 1994). The constructivist model considers the knowledge that each reader brings to text and suggests proficient readers' interaction with what they read. Pressley and Afflerbach (1995) found evidence that supports the constructivist model of reading in their synthesis of research on think-aloud protocols. After analyzing data of expert readers' self-talk before, during, and after reading text, they discovered that expert readers reflect on ideas expressed in text, make predictions and hypotheses that integrate prior knowledge, are passionate in their responses to text, and critically evaluate what they read. True classroom discussions that allow students to share their points of view and challenge students to support their arguments with text are one way for children to learn to integrate content information, personal response, and critical reading and thinking skills—all of which are ways that expert readers work to make sense from text.

Unlike the lecture modality that relies on teachers to convey information or the recitation format where we assume responsibility for evaluating student responses, effective classroom discussions of informational texts encourage students to apply what they have read in an exchange of ideas and to modify their responses as classroom members interact with one another. Research supports the notion that learning advantages take place when children are given the opportunity to discuss text with peers. For example, Almasi and Gambrell (1994) examined the nature of fourth graders' sociocognitive conflicts in peer-led and teacher-led discussions. Sociocognitive conflict is defined as the "state of cognitive unrest that an individual confronts while participating in social interactions" (p. 2). Almasi and Gambrell discovered that in peer-led discussions, students were more likely to recognize and resolve their own misunderstandings about text because in a group setting "cognitive unrest" is more likely to be shared and exposed. Conversely, in teacher-led discussions, teachers tended to assume the

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role of exposing students' inconsistencies. Almasi and Gambrell suggested that relying on the teacher to serve as the interpretive authority may cause students to become passive learners. In order for children to become active, independent readers and thinkers, they need to recognize and resolve their own discrepancies with text. One way to encourage this process is to provide children with opportunities to participate in peer discussions.

Furthermore, McMahon (1992) found that in small group discussions of historical fiction, fourth and fifth grade students were able to construct and modify their ideas upon hearing others within the group communicate their views about text. For example, after reading a passage that described the Peace Day Carnival celebrating the memory of those who died in the bombing of Hiroshima, one child clarified for the group that the "Carnival" was probably not like a fair or circus with roller coasters and other rides. In this way, one student was able to clarify a misconception that other group members missed in their reading. The process of discussing information with peers as a way of increasing and clarifying one's understanding occurs frequently in a number of real life settings. Just as historians engage in debates about source documents, accountants discuss tax law, engineers grapple with new techniques published in a journal, or jurors deliberate over written testimony, children also can benefit from thoughtful discussions about informational text.

Within our own experience in study groups, we have found that student-to-student conversations help to identify and clarify interpretations of informational texts and that our discussions serve to enrich and refine our understanding. Our experiences, as well as Almasi and Gambrell (1994) and McMahon's (1992) findings, support a social constructivist theory of reading that posits that literacy is a social act (Beach, 1994). As readers engage in sharing responses to informational texts in a social context, they construct new meaning as a result of interaction with others in the classroom community. The social constructivist view of reading is supported by a number of educational theorists who contend that there are important linkages between social interaction and improved reading comprehension (Gavelek, 1986; Short & Pierce, 1990). Furthermore, the social constructivist perspective is consistent with Vygotsky's (1962, 1978) work which presents language as both a communicative tool and a means by which humans develop intellectually. While a social constructivist theory is readily acknowledged with regard to narrative text, it is equally important to informational texts. Opportunities to discuss informational texts within a social context are one way that children can begin to develop higher order language expression and knowledge of content material.

Discussion can also develop word learning, a critical component that can affect one's ability to comprehend informational and narrative text. Halliday (1978) wrote:

> Language arises in the life of the individual through an ongoing exchange of meanings with significant others...in interaction with that little coterie of people who constitute his meaning group. In this sense, language is a product of the social process. (p. 1)

After reviewing a number of research studies, Ruddell (1994) concluded: "The evidence we have so far suggests that positive effects result from social interaction during word learning" (p. 436).

Expert readers often monitor their meaning construction with respect to a social criterion, such as whether enough information has been learned from text to use in an upcoming discussion (Pressley & Afflerbach, 1995). Pressley and Afflerbach believe that educators can learn from identifying what expert readers do when reading so that instruction can focus on helping children assimilate those strategies. Informing students that they will participate in a discussion before reading informational texts can help establish a purpose for reading, which is a recommended strategy to improve reading comprehension (Ryder & Graves, 1994).

Classroom discussion can also bring life to informational texts as students share their personal responses. Many students are naturally motivated to converse with one another and share their points of view. Because students must articulate their ideas, discussion can also reinforce long-term memory (Alvermann, Dillon, & O'Brien, 1987). In addition, Alvermann, Dillon and O'Brien suggest that text-based discussions can offer opportunities for students to think critically by engaging them in conversations about evaluating subtext or comparing and contrasting sources of information. Gall and Gall (1990) suggested that the discussion method can be effective for fostering general subject matter mastery, problem solving ability, moral development, attitude change and development, and development of communication skills. In addition, discussion can serve as an effective assessment tool since teacher questions may not always tap into students' misunderstandings. Hyman and Whitford (1992) wrote:

> Quite simply the teacher can and should use strategic discussion whenever students need in their cognitive development to go beyond acquiring information; whenever growing students need to learn and emphasize interpersonal skills; whenever students need further motivation to master the knowledge, skills and values...which are used in problem solving, predicting, setting policies, and explaining issues in your content area; and when students need to integrate, internalize, and apply the knowledge, skills, and values associated with the subject field. (p. 144)

What are some ways, then, that we can facilitate discussions of informational texts and accomplish these goals in our elementary school classrooms? The following section describes a number of ideas that are particularly appropriate for implementing discussions of informational texts in a content or language arts curriculum.

IDEAS FOR PROMOTING DISCUSSION OF INFORMATIONAL TEXTS

The discussion ideas presented in this section are divided into three parts: nonquestioning techniques for promoting discussion, ideas for integrating text into discussions, and strategies to stimulate thoughtful discussions of informational texts. It is important to keep in mind, however, that many of the ideas can be combined for use during instruction.

NONQUESTIONING TECHNIQUES FOR PROMOTING DISCUSSION

One assumption that has dominated instruction is that we can encourage higher level thinking and more elaborate student responses by asking higher level questions about informational texts. Although research results are mixed, the overall conclusion is that higher level questions during instruction have a positive effect on student achievement (Redfield & Rousseau, 1981), particularly for those students of average to high ability and where independent thinking is required (Gall, 1984). Even though most teacher education textbooks recommend higher level questions during instruction, Gall (1970) found that "about 60 percent of teachers' questions require students to recall facts; about 20 percent require students to think; and the remaining 20 percent are procedural" (p. 713). Furthermore, a number of studies reveal that many students respond to higher level questions on a significantly lower level than the question itself (Dillon, 1982). There is doubt as to whether teacher-directed higher order questions are sufficient for stimulating higher order thinking from students. One alternative suggested by Dillon (1985, 1990) is to use nonquestioning techniques. Dillon argues that nonquestioning techniques tend to enhance discussion whereas teacher questions tend to curtail discussion. The following section describes a number of nonquestioning techniques as suggested by Dillon (1985, 1990).

DECLARATIVE STATEMENTS. One alternative to teacher questioning involves the teacher's responding to a student's comment with a declarative statement. For example, in a science unit on space, a child's comment that Mars might be a good planet for astronauts to visit because it is close to Earth can be followed by a teacher-declarative statement such as, "But our photographs show that no life has been found on Mars," instead of another teacher question. Research supports the notion that children tend to provide longer and more elaborate responses to statements than to questions (Dillon, 1985). Following declarative statements with wait time can cue children that it is their turn to respond to your statement.

REFLECTIVE STATEMENTS. Another alternative to questioning involves reflective statements in which teachers state their understanding of a student's response. For example, after reading the historical fiction text "The Golden Crane" (Coerr, 1977), a child might state, "I think Sadako was important to the children of Japan because she died from the atomic bomb."

Instead of asking another question, we might respond, "So you think that the reason she meant so much to other children in Japan is because her death was caused by the atomic bomb." Research suggests that children tend to elaborate and clarify their responses when teachers repeat or rephrase their comments (Orsolini & Pontecorvo, 1992).

STATE OF MIND. Another way to elicit student responses is to describe our true state of mind after listening to a child's comments. For example, if a child does not clearly convey his or her point of view, we might respond, "I understand what you are saying to a degree, but I'm not sure what you meant when you said..." Or, if a child makes an interesting remark but does not provide a developed idea, we might say, "That's quite a profound statement. Tell me how you came to this conclusion." In this way, we are encouraging students to elaborate upon their responses as well as express themselves clearly.

STUDENT QUESTIONING. Another alternative to teacher questioning is student questioning. Students can be prompted to formulate their own questions in order to help one another work through their confusion (see Commeyras, Sherrill & Wuenker, this volume, for further discussion), or the teacher may ask other students to pose a question about an individual's contribution (Dillon, 1990). Mishler (1978) found that in first-grade classrooms, children's responses to students' questions were more elaborate than their responses to teacher questions.

IDEAS FOR INTEGRATING TEXT INTO DISCUSSION

One way that we can encourage students to assume responsibility for understanding informational text is to invite them to support their ideas using the text. Work done by Alvermann, Dillon, O'Brien, and Smith (1985) with seventh and eighth graders has direct application to children at the elementary level. They suggested a variety of ways in which teachers can encourage students to integrate text information into whole group or small group discussions. The following describes a number of these techniques.

INFORMATION VERIFICATION. One way that children can learn to support their statements with text is by asking them to verify their comments using textbook information. For example, fourth graders could be asked to discuss in small groups the similarities and differences between exploration during the time of Columbus and today's space exploration. We could then ask our students to verify their comments by referring to their text and to identify their remarks as either literal or inferential (for example, what information is obtained directly from the text and which comments are inference statements based on text information?). It is important to note, however, that the information verification procedure is not a process whereby the teacher asks a question, the student "looks up" the answer in text, and the teacher evaluates the response. Ideally, a text verification procedure should encourage independent thinking and integration of background knowledge using information gleaned from text. The information verification technique is particularly appropriate when asking students to support their personal responses.

INDIRECT REFERENCE. Students can also be asked to refer indirectly to information provided in text in order to jog their memory or to compare and contrast past and present material. For example, in a third grade science unit on animals, children may be asked to participate in a discussion about the food chain and the interdependence of living things. If the students appear to have grasped the idea but have difficulty providing more concrete examples, we might ask the class to refer to a textbook illustration in order to help them elaborate upon their responses. One idea is that teachers balance their discussions by employing both verification and indirect reference techniques.

REFOCUSING. Sometimes textbook information can drive a sequence of instruction. In order to refocus students' attention to the next portion of material, we can ask them to predict text content by skimming the chapter outline, subheadings, or illustrations. Students could also be asked to relate what they have learned to their predictions. For example, in a science unit on electricity, students may have learned about how a battery works and may have tested materials for conductivity. We could ask students to look at the next part of the assigned reading in the textbook that shows illustrations of a completed circuit with a battery, wires, and a light bulb. Using a refocusing technique, we might ask students to predict text content after skimming the subheadings and looking at the illustrations. Students can then be asked to read the text to see if the information presented supported their hypothesis. One caution: although this technique may help to provide a logical sequence for instruction, overuse of refocusing may send a message to students that the text, not their thinking, is of greatest value.

PARAPHRASING. Another way of integrating text into discussions involves asking students to paraphrase or summarize information provided by an author. Alvermann, Dillon, O'Brien, and Smith (1985) found that children often have difficulty paraphrasing informational text and that students often steal sidelong glances at text to help them paraphrase an author's words. One strategy to help learners paraphrase information can include asking students to read a small portion of text (silently or aloud) and then to participate in a Think, Pair, Share activity where they paraphrase or summarize information with their neighbor. Responses can then be shared with the class.

STRATEGIES FOR STIMULATING THOUGHTFUL DISCUSSIONS

The following strategies provide a number of teaching ideas for stimulating thoughtful discussions of informational texts in a content or language arts curriculum. Each can be adapted to suit a particular grade level or student's needs.

BEST IDEA. This is a simple discussion strategy adapted from Hyman and Whitford (1990) that integrates the use of text, personal response, and small and whole group discussion. Before reading a portion of informational text, ask students to write one or more ideas that occur to them as they read, (such as what was confusing, interesting, or relevant to their lives). Students can write their ideas while they read, or they can write their idea(s) after reading. Then, children select their best idea to share with others in a small group. After five or ten minutes, ask students to share their ideas with the entire class either individually or through a group spokesperson. For example, after reading a portion of *Samuel Eaton's Day* (Waters, 1993) or *Sarah Morton's Day* (Waters, 1989) about life in colonial America, third graders' best idea responses might include: "I was confused by the words thee and thou. What do they mean?" or "I thought it was interesting that the boys usually spent the day with their father and the girls spent the days with their mother." When using best idea strategies, students must reflect on their reading by writing their ideas on paper, and each child is given the opportunity to express their views in small group wherein they obtain feedback from others. Best idea not only helps to integrate text information into discussion; it also serves to "prime the pump," using small group discussion as a way to increase participation in whole class discussions.

STATEMENT BASED REASONING GUIDES. Statement based reasoning guides (Herber, 1978) are also an effective strategy for integrating text and discussion. Begin the process by creating several statements that reflect the author's viewpoint or an opposing viewpoint. For example, a statement based reasoning guide for the tradebook *Batman: Exploring the World of Bats* (Pringle, 1991) might look like Figure 1.

After reading text, students respond to each statement in small groups by either agreeing or disagreeing with each statement using text to support their views. Afterwards,

Figure 1
Statement based reasoning guides.

Agree or disagree? Support your views with text.

- Bats are a problem because they get stuck in people's hair.
- Bats are gentle and intelligent.
- Bats are of no value to humans.
- We need to exterminate bats that find their way into our attics.
  (Statements that reflect and conflict with information provided in text can be included for more challenging analyses):
- Bats contract rabies and therefore are a serious health risk to humans.

teachers choose those statements that created the most controversy within groups for use as a springboard for whole class discussion.

Statement-based reasoning guides can also be used as a prereading strategy. Have students respond to the statements before reading, supporting their ideas with background knowledge. Then children form small groups to discuss their views. As students read the text selection, encourage them to look for evidence that may support or contradict their original responses. Small groups can meet again to discuss their findings and then report to the whole group for discussion.

THE INTRA-ACT PROCEDURE. The intra-act procedure (Hoffman, 1979) is a four-step procedure that stimulates small group discussion and helps members develop an awareness of how other members of the group react to the content of text. The steps are as follows: First, individual students silently read a text selection. Then, children are asked to discuss the selection in small groups. A chairperson is assigned for each group; he or she is asked to begin the discussion by providing a summary statement of text content. The teacher then provides each child with four value statements relevant to the text selection. Figure 2 shows statements that would be relevant if the students were studying whales using informational texts and reading *The Whales' Song* (Sheldon, 1990).

Students are asked to agree or disagree with each statement without revealing their opinions to other members of the group. Then, students write their predictions about how they think other members of the small group will respond. Students are then regrouped to compare their predictions with actual student responses. Learners are encouraged to challenge each other's responses and provide reasons for arguments based on text information and prior knowledge.

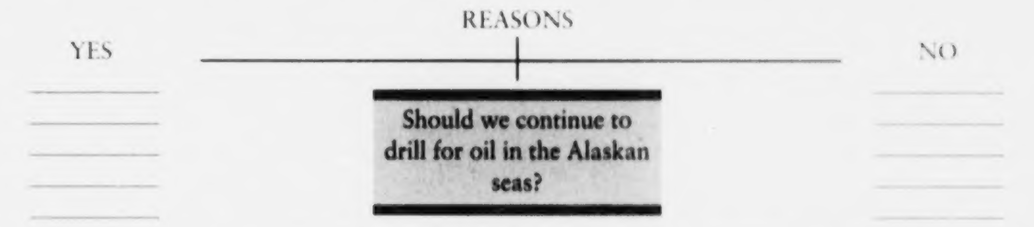
DISCUSSION WEBS. A discussion web (Alvermann, 1991) is a form of graphic organizer that uses a Think, Pair, Share process. Figure 3 is an example of a discussion web from an elementary level science unit on water and pollution. After reading *Spill: The Story of the Exxon Valdez* (Carr, 1991), the teacher writes a thought provoking question in the center block of the web.

Figure 2
The intra-act procedure.

Do you agree or disagree? How do you think your group members will respond?

- I think that whales are magical, wondrous creatures.
- I believe that whales are most important for their meat, and for their bones, and for their blubber.
- I don't think that whales should be hunted anymore.

Figure 3
Discussion web.



Students are instructed to work in pairs to discuss and list reasons why drilling for oil should be continued and then list contrary reasons on the other side of the web. Then, one set of partners pairs with another in order to compare and contrast reasons. Students are asked to reach a group consensus regarding the teacher-posed question and list or check their best reasons that support their thinking. A student- or teacher-selected spokesperson from each group then reports the group's conclusion in order to stimulate whole class discussion. Spokespersons are encouraged to point out dissenting points of view within the group. Then each student writes their own response to the question, supporting their reasoning. Students are encouraged to use any of the ideas provided during whole class discussion. With some experience, students can be prompted to develop the class question.

READING BETWEEN THE LINES (RBL). The reading between the lines strategy, adapted from Krieger (1991), primarily consists of a series of prompts that encourage readers to move beyond the literal level and to critically evaluate text by looking for author intention, hidden agendas, and missing information. The questions that follow are particularly appropriate for use with informational texts such as primary source documents, advertisements, different accounts of the same event, or even a textbook passage (see Figure 4). Students may be provided with one or more questions, depending upon grade level and text selection. Also, you may want to engage your students in this discussion strategy after they have read and discussed the main idea(s) of the text. RBL questions would then be presented prior to a second reading.

Begin by discussing the questions you have selected for discussion in order to set a purpose for students' reading. Keep in mind that you may first need to model responses to these questions in whole class using a text excerpt.

Students are then instructed to read the selected passage silently or aloud in small groups. After reading, small groups use the questions to prompt discussion. A group recorder takes notes and a spokesperson reports their group's findings to the whole class.

Figure 4
Reading between the lines strategy.

Questions for Text Analysis

- Who wrote this? Does he or she belong to any special group?
- What audience do you think the author had in mind when he or she wrote this? What makes you think this?
- Why do you think the author wrote this piece? What was his or her purpose?
- Does the author try to persuade you in any way? How?
- How did you feel when you read this piece? What words, statements, or phrases does the author use to try to make you feel this way?
- Does the author make any statements that could be more opinion than fact? List and label them. What clues helped you reach your conclusions?
- When you read this piece, were you confused in any way? Describe.
- Is there any information that you know about the topic that the author has left out? Why do you think the author did not include this information?

We have provided a sample of text with italicized words and phrases in order to illustrate the kinds of rhetoric that can be discovered and critically evaluated using RBL questions. After studying about Columbus, students could be given the following passage from *The World Book Encyclopedia* (Morison, 1959):

> COLUMBUS, CHRISTOPHER, *discoverer* of America, was one of the greatest seamen and navigators of all time. He was a self-made and self-educated man with *one idea*—to reach the East by sailing west. Wise men of olden times and the Middle Ages had always believed this to be possible. Columbus, however, proved that it could be done. He opened the New World to the *use and knowledge* of the Europeans (p. 691).

You may want to begin the RBL strategy using a paragraph that you have highlighted, just as we have done. Then ask students to engage in the more difficult task of using RBL with *un*highlighted text. The RBL strategy could also be used with a "jigsaw puzzle" approach, where different groups are given different questions to answer. The pieces of the puzzle are then integrated during a whole class discussion.

The RBL strategy might also be used with multiple texts in which conflicting information about the same event is presented. The Columbus example presented might be contrasted with segments from the following texts to provide alternate views of Columbus's voyage to the New World: Yolen's (1992) book, *Encounter* outlines the voyage, arrival, and description of Columbus through the eyes of a Taino Indian child. In *I Columbus: My Journal* (1990), the editors present original (translated) journal entries of Columbus to depict his voyage, thoughts, and actions that are in conflict with society's previous notions (see Guthrie & McCann and Hartman & Allison, this volume, for an extended discussion of using multiple texts for discussion).

SELF-TO-GROUP DEBATE. Self-to-group debate, adapted from a discussion strategy designed by Roby (1983), is designed to encourage students to search for the most convincing arguments on an issue related to informational text. After reading, the teacher poses an issue-oriented question to the class. For example, during a third grade science unit on animals and after reading *Farewell to Shady Glade* (Peet, 1966), the teacher might ask: "Who should get the land? The people or the animals?" Once teachers have modeled examples of issue-oriented questions, students can be encouraged to design the class question. Students then work in pairs to describe and write arguments from text and personal knowledge supporting one point of view, such as why the people should get the land. Afterwards, ask students to take the opposing point of view, writing arguments against the first position. Then, individual students choose their best arguments and present them to their partners. Encourage students to evaluate one another's arguments, searching for faulty reasoning. Afterwards, students reflect upon their ideas on the issue and consider if their position has been strengthened, modified, or abandoned and why.

Students could then be asked to write a persuasive paper stating their position with supporting arguments, or the class may engage in a debate where groups of students are formed based upon individual positions. For a class debate, arrange students in a circle or semicircle so that children will be encouraged to talk to one another. Have each group develop its position using arguments from individual students within the group. Then, each group presents its case through one or two student spokespersons. Class members are prompted by a neutral student moderator to ask the group questions. The groups should be given an allotted amount of time to present their position and answer questions. The student moderator is also given the task of monitoring time. Also, you may wish to randomly select a jury panel who also asks group members questions and is given the task of deciding which group's arguments were the most convincing and why. Jury panel students need to understand that their reasoning in reaching their decision will be evaluated by their peers and that personal friendships should not influence their decision.

GUIDELINES FOR PROMOTING DISCUSSION OF INFORMATIONAL TEXT

We have outlined a number of discussion strategy suggestions of informational text that can be integrated in and adapted for classroom instruction. These strategies include:

- Ask fewer teacher-generated questions; increase the number of student-generated questions.

- Respond to students with a non-question rather than a question in order to stimulate student talk and thinking.
- Integrate and apply text to talk. Encourage students to use text to support their ideas.
- Pose a single higher order question, issue, or problem.
- Increase student responsibility for comprehending text. Encourage students to apply their knowledge to discussion.
- Emphasize higher level reading and thinking skills and application of text knowledge, critical thinking, and problem solving.
- Provide opportunities for each child to verbalize and share his or her point of view about informational text.
- "Prime the pump"—Provide opportunities for small group, peer-led discussions that lead to whole group discussions so that children can express and clarify their ideas.
- Maintain a role in guiding students' thinking.

Although theory and research support the view that discussion can improve comprehension of informational text, we must also recognize that text talk takes time. However, we can view discussion about informational texts as time well spent if we support the notion that depth of knowledge is at the heart of real literacy learning.

AUTHORS' NOTE

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CHAPTER 10

Transforming Grand Conversations into Grand Creations: Using Different Types of Text to Influence Student Discussion

Dorothy J. Leal

Good teachers are always looking for ways to create environments that nurture the love of learning and to help children make connections between good books and creative learning activities. This chapter will explain how specific types of text can influence academic growth and learning, and also will discuss ways a teacher can use text to create a classroom culture that fosters lively discussions, fascinating interpretations, and deep comprehension of text.

Text structure plays an important role in how students view a book as well as how they will build meaning in a collaborative setting (Armbruster, Anderson, & Ostertag, 1989). For example, narrative and expository text structures have very different purposes and inspire different forms of involvement from a reader. Storybooks have a narrative text structure that assumes the reader's willing suspension of disbelief about the reality of the story (Coleridge, 1907). Meaning, for the reader, is drawn from the events and interaction of characters (Rosenblatt, 1985). In contrast, information books with their expository text structure expect the reader to fully believe the accuracy of the material presented and believe that meaning is drawn from the information itself (Rosenblatt, 1985). These basic differences can influence children's book choices and enthusiasm for reading.

> *“Narrative and expository text structures have very different purposes and inspire different forms of involvement from a reader.”*

A third type of text seems to offer the best of both worlds. When narrative and expository characteristics of text are combined into an informational storybook, the reader not only suspends disbelief about the reality of the story, but also accepts the accuracy of the information presented (Leal, 1989, 1991; Pappas, Kiefer, & Levstik, 1990). A sense of the text's meaning is acquired from both interaction with the storybook characters and events as well as from the expository information itself. In other words, this third type of text, represented by the popular *Magic School Bus* books (Cole, 1986, 1987, 1989, 1990, 1992, 1994), has the purposes and benefits of both narrative and expository text structure. Additional differences among these types of text can be found in Table 1.

Table 1
Contrasting characteristics of three types of text.

	Text type		
Characteristic	Storybook	Info story	Info book
Meaning derived from events & characters	+	+	–
Meaning derived from information	–	+	+
Assumes willing suspension of disbelief	+	+	–
Assumes belief in accuracy of information	–	+	+
Particular topic, identified by title	–	±	+
Initial presentation of topic	–	±	+
Use of past tense	+	±	–
Use of present tense	–	±	+
Prose paragraph style	+	±	–
Expository language structure/information-giving words	–	±	+
Illustrations extend meaning of text	+	±	–
Illustrations give accuracy, clarification, explanation	–	±	+
Specific setting	+	±	–
Temporal sequence/passage of time	+	±	–
Particular character(s)	+	±	–
Plot structure w/conflicts & resolutions	+	±	–
Use of dialogue	+	±	–
Use of mood/tone	+	±	–
Descriptive attributes of textual information	–	±	+
Report of typical actions, events, behaviors	–	±	+

GRAND ACCOMPLISHMENTS: THE POWER OF TEXT TO INFLUENCE DISCUSSIONS, INTERPRETATIONS, AND COMPREHENSION OF TEXT

Language is powerful. Skillfully crafted books use language to invite readers to make connections between the known and unknown. Paterson (1981) says that books "pull together for us a world that is falling apart. They are the worlds that integrate us, judge us, comfort and heal us. They are the worlds that...bring order out of chaos" (pp. 17–18).

Just what type of text has that kind of power in today's classrooms? Narrative books have a strong presence in classrooms around the country. Children naturally enjoy reading, listening to, and discussing stories. Classroom libraries, when present, are typically made up of books that are mostly narrative. In addition, reading narrative storybooks aloud is a popular practice that is enjoyed by all (Trelease, 1989).

In contrast, information books are typically used for reports and are checked out of school and public libraries. Rarely are they a focus for classroom discussions or libraries. In addition, reading aloud from information books is not a common occurrence (Kobrin, 1988). In fact, in a recent study when children were asked to discuss the most interesting book or story they had read, many children could not think of any information book they had found interesting (Gambrell, Codling, & Kennedy, 1994).

The informational storybook, or "infotainment" genre (Leal, 1993a), has only recently become popular with the introduction of the *Magic School Bus* books and television series. Interestingly, students who became familiar with this type of text when read aloud enjoy both narrative and expository text.

Recent studies reveal that using contrasting genres of text with children can result in three important differences. First, different types of text will elicit discussions and interpretations with contrasting characteristics, with the informational storybook demonstrating a higher level of student involvement in several areas (Leal, 1992). Second, different types of text can elicit interesting differences in written responses, revealing that the informational storybook promotes more positive responses as well as deeper levels of thinking than the information book (Leal, Moss, & Kearney, 1994; Moss & Leal, 1994). Third, the informational storybook may promote a greater level of comprehension of textually presented information (Leal, 1994; Maria & Junge, 1994).

What is it about the informational storybook that is so appealing to children? Although the primacy of narrative has been challenged (Pappas, 1993), could it be possible that children will meaningfully engage with any type of text when given an opportunity for discussion? If this is the case, and narrative is still primary, then such a text may have power to influence student learning and intensify the memory of expository information when the information is carried within a narrative structure. A closer look at what recent studies reveal about different types of text in the classroom will be helpful in this regard.

CLASSROOM DISCUSSIONS

> *“Peer group discussions of informational stories have the power to engage and challenge students to a deeper level of involvement.”*

Although discussions of narrative stories have benefits for all ages (Beach & Wendler, 1987; Morrow, 1989; Samway, et al., 1991), and even young children have shown an ability to retell information books (Pappas, 1993; Pappas & Brown, 1988), the informational storybook has been shown to elicit richer discussions in pedagogically important ways. In one study of first, third, and fifth grade students' peer group discussions of these three types of text, four specific benefits of the informational storybook were found (Leal, 1991, 1992). First, students were much more likely to use their prior knowledge along with information gleaned from their peers to construct understanding of both the story as well as the information. Second when discussing this type of text they continued their discussions for much longer periods of time. Third, they expressed speculations and predictions, and they thought twice as often with the informational storybook than when they discussed the storybook or information book. Fourth, they were much more likely to make extra-textual connections to interpret this text than with either the storybook or information book. Such findings suggest that peer group discussions of informational stories have the power to engage and challenge students to a deeper level of involvement.

WRITTEN RESPONSES

Two studies of written responses to both information books and informational storybooks, the first comparing second, fourth, and sixth graders' responses and the second examining gifted students' responses (Leal, Moss, & Kearney, 1994; Moss & Leal, 1994), revealed interesting observations about children's engagement with different types of texts. Students in this study were read three information books and three informational storybooks. After each book reading, students were asked to respond to four questions that could help a teacher evaluate student understanding and learning. These questions are also useful for promoting discussions of text:

1. What did you think was the most important information in this book? (important information)
2. What did you learn from this book that surprised you? (new and interesting information)
3. What else would you like to know that the book did not tell you? (missing information)
4. What would you tell a good friend about the book? (affective assessment criteria)

Results indicated that children at all levels took an efferent stance for both types of text, yet expressed stronger positive attitudes and engaged the information at a deeper level when writing about the informational storybook. Such findings suggest that the informational storybook is a powerful tool for motivation, writing, learning, and engagement with scientific concepts and could be used to help build bridges to expository topics that might otherwise be boring.

COMPREHENSION OF TEXT

Another study (Leal, 1994) suggests that the informational storybook may also promote a greater level of comprehension and retention of the information presented. In this study, 96 third grade students were divided into two groups. One group was read information books and the other informational storybooks—both on the same topic. To assess students' prior knowledge of the topic, identical 10-question tests were given before the book readings, immediately after, and then again six weeks later. The results indicated that students who were read the informational storybook had less difficulty remembering scientific information both immediately after the story reading as well as six weeks later.

Although further replicating studies are needed to support these studies, these initial results suggest that the informational storybook is an important tool for classroom motivation and learning and one that would benefit student learning in today's classrooms.

TOOLS FOR GRAND CREATIONS

These learning outcomes have some exciting implications for classroom use. In order to think creatively about classroom implementation, three potentially powerful ways to increase student learning and engagement with various types of text will be explored: reading aloud different genres of books, classroom peer group discussions of texts, and process writing projects involving different genres of literature, including the informational storybook.

READING ALOUD FROM DIFFERENT GENRES

Reading aloud from different types of books is the first step in providing an environment that nurtures the love of learning. Although it is popular today for teachers to read aloud to their classes on a daily basis, the vast majority of reading aloud is from narrative stories. Yet, the studies reported above indicate that students are able to enjoy, discuss and explore books of different genres. The opportunity for students to listen, enjoy, and learn from various types of text when read aloud has many advantages for both students and teacher.

READING ALOUD NARRATIVE BOOKS. Reading good storybooks aloud can be enjoyable for all ages. The opportunity to share the lives and adventures of imaginary people is an invitation to think about events in our own lives. Whether the experience involves the absence of joy, pain, color, memory, and love as experienced by the memorable characters found in *The Giver* (Lowry, 1993), or whether we explore and laugh about the wonders of curiosity and language with Milo in *The Phantom Tollbooth* (Juster, 1961), the fact remains that a group memory and shared life is created through the power of narrative.

A group memory can be so strong that it often lasts a lifetime. Each term when I ask my university education majors to share their favorite children's book, they almost always tell about a book that was read by a particular teacher or a book they read together with their own family. Such an experience binds the participants together for more than the period of time spent reading the book. To demonstrate this shared experience to my university students, I always read aloud a good children's book. There is a tangible silence that savors the language, events, and characters of the story as well as the fact that we have shared it together. How can one *not* remember such a shared experience?

There are many good resource books for read-aloud books. The one I recommend to teachers, parents, and students is *The New Read Aloud Handbook* (Trelease, 1989). However, the best resource book for all types of books is one created by the students themselves. Specific books that have been enjoyed as a class, in small groups, or even individually can be collected to form a good list of recommended books. Every year I ask students to decide on what will be written about each book. Typically they will include author, title, copyright date, a short summary, and reasons why it is such a good book. However, each time I read a book to a new class, I am always impressed by the creative ideas that differ from previous years. One year, students may decide to evaluate books on a scale expressing their satisfaction, such as outstanding, very good, and good. Others may want to include pictures with each entry. Choice is an important aspect of ownership.

Teachers can then turn each class's contribution into one chapter of a collective book of favorites. Each year a new chapter will be written by new students. The list grows and the children have invested part of their shared book experience with future students.

READING ALOUD INFORMATION BOOKS. What happens when a person reads information books in addition to stories? The benefits are multiplied. Reading aloud information books has several important outcomes that most teachers will not want to overlook. First, reading aloud from this genre familiarizes students with a text structure that is typically difficult and sometimes fearsome. Reading information texts and offering opportunities to discuss the book at any level provides a backdrop for instruction about text structure as well as content coverage in a nonthreatening context. Second, reading aloud good information books in the classroom can take away some of the dread of science, social studies, or math and replace it with a healthy curiosity about specific topical areas mentioned in the book. Third, reading information books in a shared book setting provides a social experience that may result in personal exchanges about these books and their topics. Fourth, a teacher never knows when a particular book is going to hit a responsive chord and begin a lifelong topical interest for a student. Teachers need to prepare students for the information age and discover their areas of natural giftedness. Reading information books aloud provides a wonderful avenue for tapping undiscovered interests as well as exposing students to topics of learning in the content areas.

The best resource book for nonfiction read-aloud books that I have found is *Eyeopeners* (Kobrin, 1988). Kobrin's work is to nonfiction what Trelease's work is to fiction. They are a wonderful set of companion books that can be shared with both students and parents. In addition, both books have tips for those who are involved in sharing books with children.

> ***"A teacher never knows when a particular book is going to hit a responsive chord and begin a lifelong topical interest for a student."***

READING ALOUD INFORMATIONAL STORYBOOKS. Perhaps you are convinced that reading aloud stories and information books is something that should take place in today's classrooms. Is there anything more a teacher can do to enrich the lives of his or her students?

Reading aloud informational storybooks offers benefits in addition to those offered from reading aloud books from the typical genres mentioned above. Because the informational storybook challenges students with both narrative events and fascinating, often humorous information, children enjoy these books greatly. In addition, the information may be more interesting and memorable (Leal, 1994; Lucas, 1991; Maria & Johnson, 1990; Maria & Junge, 1994).

When students are struggling with a particular topic or concept, the style of the informational storybook may provide the structure that will enable them to make the missing connections. Humor, the "what if" premise of the book, and the unusual pictures can spark understanding that might otherwise lie dormant. In addition, reading aloud informational storybooks offers specific and unique opportunities to create a nurturing learning environment.

First, the activity can act as an innovative introduction to units of study that might otherwise be lacking a good connection to the students' world. For instance, using *The Magic School Bus Lost in the Solar System* (Cole, 1989) to introduce a unit on the solar system has the potential of engaging students in lively discussions that result in a greater interest and involvement in the science text and the learning itself. In addition,such discussions often lead students to search for good expository books on the same topic. Therefore, these books act as a bridge into books that might otherwise be considered unpopular. Even encyclopedias can become a wonderful, sought after resource with the right inspiration.

Second, reading aloud informational storybooks can provide an opportunity to examine the characteristics of two major text structures at the same time. Both narrative and expository characteristics can be found and compared. It is also useful to read aloud information books and informational storybooks on the same topic and have the students find the differences. See Appendix A for a list of information books and informational storybooks on the same topic: earth science, space science, and the human body. Some questions to help guide discussions of information books and informational storybook comparisons might be:

> ***"When students are struggling with a particular topic or concept, the style of the informational storybook may provide the structure that will enable them to make the missing connections."***

- Would you classify this book as fiction or nonfiction? Why?
- What do you think was the primary purpose of the author in writing this book?
- In what ways does this book differ from book 2 and/or book 3 on the same topic?
- Within each set of books on the same topic, which one did you prefer? Why?

Last, informational storybooks are a great source for challenging discussions that lead to the creation of student-owned projects including the authoring of stories and books that combine different text structures. Reading aloud informational storybooks can result in wonderful class discussions, surprising concept learning, innovative projects and activities, and a classroom of students who have a positive attitude toward reading as well as the subject in focus (Leal, 1993b). A list of good informational storybooks to read aloud is found in Appendix B.

READING ALOUD OTHER GENRES OF LITERATURE. Storybooks, information books, and informational storybooks will provide a great variety in any classroom. But there are other genres of literature that will further enrich and broaden the understanding and interests of students. Reading aloud poetry, humorous stories, newspapers, announcements, letters—anything that bridges to everyday life—can stimulate student thinking, provide an overview of the functions of language, and help motivate students to enjoy and learn about new areas of interest. Whatever function of print is enjoyed at your grade level can be included in reading aloud.

One way to begin a good list of books to read aloud to your class is to begin the year by giving each child a reading survey and interest inventory. You may also find it useful to poll them to discover the books they have read for pleasure, both personally and in a classroom, along with other questions that reveal needs and interests. When the teacher is familiar with student interests and needs, then book "fits" can be more easily made.

The more familiar students become with different books and different text structures, the more likely they will be to use these types of books confidently and without hesitation. Teachers have a great opportunity to expand their students' horizons by reading aloud from provocative and interesting genres and providing opportunities for rich engaged discussions.

PEER GROUP DISCUSSIONS

Reading aloud is the foundation for grand creations, not the final product. Sessions of reading aloud that include discussion provide further benefits to students and teachers alike (Eeds & Wells, 1989). Although discussions are not an end in themselves, they are flexible tools that provide opportunities to "change direction easily, to qualify our first thoughts, to reframe ideas in different ways, leap to new connections" (Barnes, 1995, p. 3). Engaging students in collaborative discussions of different types of text, particularly the informational storybook, can lead to wonderful discoveries. In addition to revealing the prior knowledge and experience of your students about the subject in focus, there are numerous teaching possibilities arising from students' revealed interests that can encourage the students to become conscientious language users, collaborative problem-solvers, and independent thinkers.

> ***"Reading aloud poetry, humorous stories, newspapers, announcements, letters—anything that bridges to everyday life—can stimulate student thinking, provide an overview of the functions of language, and help motivate students to enjoy and learn about new areas of interest."***

So what happens *after* the discussion that fosters these qualities? As you read the following student discussion of one informational storybook, think about the potential for follow-up instruction, student research, and learning. Also, note how these third grade students are not only enjoying their discussion of *How to Dig a Hole to the Other Side of the World* (McNulty, 1979) but are carrying on a topically relevant discussion without teacher questions to structure and guide the direction of the interactions. They are helping one another to modify and extend individual interpretations. This new negotiated understanding would not have been available from an independent reading (Leal, 1991).

James: I think the story's make believe because it'd take a long time to dig, and you couldn't carry all that stuff if you have to carry a shovel to dig with.

Jennifer: And that spaceship...

Toby: That guy, the person that wrote the story, mighta been an astronaut or something.

David: He coulda been someone that studied bugs or the earth or something so he could know what kind of bugs there were.

Susan: I think it's about half fiction and half nonfiction because it tells you all about what's underneath the world and the center of the world, but you can't really go through and dig a hole through the world.

David: You couldn't dig eight million trillion billion miles but you really could tell what's under the world. Like you know it's all rock, but it's different kinds of rock.

So what happens next? Rather than worksheets, reports, or text-dictated projects that focus on the basic concepts to be learned, one strategy I have successfully used in the classroom that encourages student ownership through choices, authentic and challenging purposes, and rich opportunities for collaboration is the "C-4-Yourself" (see for yourself) strategy. This strategy is built on four components: challenge, choice, collaboration, and creation.

CHALLENGE.

- Challenge students to listen to a good book and be willing to share their ideas about the book with other students. Then read an interesting storybook, information book, informational storybook, or book from any other genre aloud. Explain that you are interested in what they think and will be stopping to let them talk about their ideas once or twice during the reading. After you have done this activity for a period of time, you could even choose a book you think they will not like—with hopes that they will express their dislike and will give you relevant reasons why it is not a good book.
- Stop at appropriate times to allow students to discuss their ideas, questions, and wonderings about what has been read so far. You may want to divide the class into groups of four to six students for discussion or ask them to share with one another in the large group. You can focus their discussion with specific questions or you can let them discuss whatever interests them.
- Your job is to listen and take notes on what they talk about. If your students are meeting in small groups, walk around to each of the groups and jot down brief notes on the topics they are discussing.

Table 2
C-4-Yourself sample interest topics.

Topic	Challenge question	Student choice	Creative evidence
Careers in earth science			
Tools used for earth exploration			
Make-up of the earth			
Fiction and nonfiction differences			
How to author a book			

Table 3
C-4-Yourself sample challenge questions.

Topic	Challenge question	Student choice	Creative evidence
Careers in earth science	What careers are possible if you wanted to dig a hole through the earth?		
Tools used for earth exploration	What tools would really have to be developed to make a hole through the earth?		
Make-up of the earth	How are the layers of the earth different and which ones would be easiest to dig through?		
Fiction and nonfiction differences	How can we tell if this is a fiction or nonfiction book?		
How to author a book	What would an author have to do to write a book like this?		

CHOICE.

- After the discussion, list on the board the topics of interest you recorded while listening. For example, in the above excerpt from a discussion about digging a hole through the earth, the students expressed specific areas of interest related to books, learning, and earth science. A few of the topics students suggested include: careers in earth science, tools used for earth exploration, the contents of the earth, differences between fiction and nonfiction, and book authorship shown in Table 2.

Table 4
Sample form for student choices.

Topic	Challenge question	Student choice	Creative evidence
Careers in earth science	What careers are possible if you wanted to dig a hole through the earth?	Susie Sam Jamie Jamel Ramona	
Tools used for earth exploration	What tools would really have to be developed to make a hole through the earth?	Luis Jenny Seth Jeremy	
Make-up of the earth	How are the layers of the earth different and which ones would be easiest to dig through?	Rebecca Willy Josh Timothy Steven Linda	
Fiction and nonfiction differences	How can we tell if this is a fiction or nonfiction book?	Karl Pedro Katy Nora Maeghan	
How to author a book	What would an author have to do to write a book like this?	Michael Daniel Anna Sara Sharissa	

- Together as a class, turn each topic of interest into a "what-we-really-want-to-know" question. Add these questions next to the topics on the board, as depicted in Table 3.
- Then give students a choice. Allow each child to select and write down the topic question that most interests her or him. Add student names on the board or chart next to the questions, as shown in Table 4.

COLLABORATION.

- Next, divide the class into cooperative learning groups based on their specific area of interest. Provide time for groups to meet and discuss the question and come up with some real "wonderings" about the subject. Direct them to make a list of what they want to find out.
- For the next week, give the students time to work together in groups to visit the library, read, and find out everything they can about the topic. Using a separate page for each point they want to find out about, older students can take notes on their readings and discoveries and put their name by their entries. Even first and second graders can do this activity with pictorial information books and can draw pictures of what they discover.

Tables 5 and 6 show possible notes for students who want to explore differences in book genres. These charts are the result of students going to the library and examining books of each type to answer the question, "How can we tell if this is a fiction or non-fiction book?"

Table 5
Question 1: What are the characteristics of fiction books?

Date and book	Type of book	Notes	Student name
1-14 The Donkey Prince	Story	This book has main characters, a plot, a setting. It made me feel good to read it.	Katy
1-15 Lots of books	Story	I looked at bunches of picture books and they all had neat pictures, and they were pretty easy to read.	Nora

Table 6
Question 2: What are the characteristics of nonfiction books?

Date and book	Type of book	Notes	Student name
1-14 Wild and Woolly Mammoths	Information	This book gives a lot of facts about mammoths. The pictures explain the information.	Karl
1-16 Encyclopedia, The Letter M	Information	I read lots of entries in the M book. It was full of facts about things and why they are important. But it was harder to read and follow because it used so many big words that I didn't always understand.	Maeghan

CREATION.

- Similar to Guthrie and McCann's idea circles chapter and Hartman and Allison's inquiry-oriented discussions chapter, the culmination of this process is for students to take another week to create a project with their findings. If students do not have ideas for a creative project of their own, give them a choice of projects for sharing their findings with the class. Possibilities for projects on the above book topics might include: (a) jointly constructing an art project illustrating what some imaginary tools would need to look like and explaining what they would need to do to really make a hole through the earth; (b) writing three different journal entries of a trip through the earth from the point of view of three people with different careers—such as a botanist, a zoologist, a geologist; (c) presenting a debate on the best way to learn information: information books or informational storybooks.
- Share their creations with the class. Make a production out of their discoveries and presentations. Take pictures and later make a bulletin board. Also describe or put the photos of their creation in the fourth box of the C-4-Yourself chart.
- Once the presentations have been shared with the class, discuss what they have learned and what they would still like to know. Plan ways beyond the classroom to continue sharing what they have learned and what they would yet like to find out. For example, with the above book, students could write a letter to *National Geographic* or contact a local university, explaining their projects and asking their unanswered questions. Finding community organizations interested in their topics could open further avenues for research as well as recognition of what they have accomplished.

Reading good books to children helps you to challenge their thinking on many different topics. Providing a platform for discussion allows you to gather information about how your students make sense from text. Giving students choices for projects helps provide ownership of the learning. Group collaboration promotes relational connections that encourage teamwork and productivity. Presenting creative demonstrations of learning to class peers, national leaders in the field, or community agencies helps make the learning authentic and memorable.

> ***"Group collaboration promotes relational connections that encourage teamwork and productivity."***

PROCESS WRITING PROJECTS

The third suggestion for increasing student learning, discussions, and engagement with various types of text involves the process writing approach. Once a teacher or student is reading aloud from various genres of literature and having rich discussions resulting in creative projects, then it is natural to continue the process by teaching students to be authors of books using various styles and genres.

Process writing, like reading aloud and peer group discussions, can provide fuel for understanding different types of text. Process writing provides the means for exploring text type characteristics in depth. Best of all, process writing provides wonderful opportunities for additional discussions of previously read literature as well as newly authored works. Discussions of student authored text contribute to the development and refinement of student writing and comprehension of literature today.

Process writing in different genres is a natural outflow of rich discussions of books. It is also a motivating activity that is based on student ownership and choices, authentic purposes for learning, and opportunities to develop peer relationships through interactive student collaboration. It is both strategic and purposeful from the very beginning.

Process writing and the authoring of real books is recognized as a powerful vehicle for motivating student involvement with authentic purposes. There are many student authoring contests available, both national, such as Landmark's annual "Written and Illustrated By...," as well as state or locally sponsored contests. Students are encouraged to write and submit their creations and hopefully win some recognition and reward. Yet, in the vast majority of cases, today's contests are aimed at stories and narrative writing. Unfortunately, information books are not often encouraged at the contest level.

In contrast, Halliday (1975) suggests that there are at least seven functions of print. Each one is important in written forms of communication. Along with the seven functions of print in Table 7, there are process writing suggestions that would provide a useful platform for both reading aloud from different examples of these functions of print as

Table 7
Authentic process writing projects.

Function of print	Authentic process writing projects
Imaginative: Creating something new	Fictional stories: picture books, fantasy, mystery, comedy, animal stories, plays, historical fiction, poetry, info-tainment
Representational: Communicating content	Newspaper (school or class), magazines, letters to editors, merchants
Instrumental: Fulfilling personal needs	Journals: personal, dialogue, content area, and gratefulness journals
Interactional: Relational, focus on others	Biographies, histories, pen pals, memory books
Personal: Carving out uniqueness	Autobiographies, personal records of accomplishments, class anthologies
Heuristic: Finding out, discovery	Nonfiction or info-tainment books
Regulatory: Used for control	Rules, instructions, guidelines for activities, and class contracts

well as consequent peer groups discussions. The C-4-Yourself strategy could be used with any of these types of text.

The steps involved in the process writing of long-term writing projects for all functions of print are basically the same: prewriting activities, planning, drafting, sharing, recreating, editing, printing, binding, evaluating, and distributing. All along the way there are numerous opportunities to encourage grand conversations. In the following discussion, process writing stages are examined along with a description of how discussions can be encouraged at each stage of the writing experience.

During the prewriting stage you will be reading aloud from the genres of literature in focus and having rich discussions, including discussions of text structure. Over a period of days or weeks, you will want to read aloud various examples of the function of print in focus. Help the students get plugged into the basic components of the genre. For instance, with narrative writing, have rich discussions of story structure with plot, setting, characters, mood and other defining points. With expository writing, read and talk about how expository text is organized and how it highlights information. With info-tainment book writing, discuss how both narrative and expository characteristics are combined in this genre. Then give students opportunities to practice genre specific writing in collaborative groups.

When you are ready to begin the writing project, the first step is to brainstorm together and discuss ideas about what to write. It is an opportunity for students to talk about what they like about the genre and what is still not understood. Encourage students to try what they enjoy and understand about the genre and then develop it. Discussions can take place with the whole class, in smaller peer groups, in pairs, and individually between teacher and student. Teachers should be authoring stories at the same time as their students and can also contribute to rich discussions, thus modeling the process and making their own work and struggles visible to the students.

The hardest step is the first sentence, but having writing partners for conferencing can make things easier. With a narrative story, students can share with their writing partner the tentative story plot, characters, setting, and mood. For students in kindergarten and the early grades, this step could simply be sharing a picture of the beginning, middle, and end of the story along with pictures of the main characters.

With an information book or informational storybook, students can share with their writing partner some of the interesting information. Having a friend to help think through categories and ways to structure the information can be really helpful. For the informational storybook, discussions will include both story plot and information structure.

During the writing cycle of drafting, sharing, and recreating, peers can provide a great deal of support. With the first draft in hand it is usually best for students to share just a few sentences or paragraphs so that many students will have a chance for group feedback. This can be done in many ways, but the favorite of many students is author's chair. A fun and nonthreatening way to play author's chair is to ask for volunteers and have the students come to where the chair is located in the room and sit down to read what they have written to the class.

Before reading, the class is instructed to listen for three things to share with each author: (a) what they remember, (b) what they like, and, (c) what they do not understand or have questions about. The focus is never to share what they do not like, but rather to build on the positive aspects and encourage the new authors with what is memorable and impressive. This can be a powerful discussion time. During this time, the teacher will need to either tape record student comments or write them on a card for the author to use in his or her recreated edition. Students should then be encouraged and rewarded for including peer suggestions in the recreation of written passages. It is a wonderful discovery to learn that a piece of writing can be even more creative the second or third time it is revisited.

During the publishing cycle of editing, printing, binding, evaluating, and distributing, students will be involved in discussions of many kinds. Peer and teacher editing conferences are the beginning. Plans for printing and binding can provide another opportunity to learn from experienced people who can come into the classroom and lead topical discussions. Evaluation from both peers, teachers, and community will benefit most when there are reflective discussions of the created work.

The distribution and sharing of authored books with family, younger students, local libraries, and mall exhibitions, to name just a few, are rewarding times that allow students to discuss with others their new understandings about literature and authorship. To invite students to then serve as writing partners for younger students brings the writing and discussion process full circle.

CONCLUSION

The cycle for transforming grand conversations about different types of text into grand creations has also come full circle. Reading aloud wonderful books from many different genres is the first step to rich discussions. Rich discussions lead to many wonderful creations, from activities such as the C-4-Yourself strategy to authoring long term writing projects in various genres of literature. The choices are endless. What is clear is that having many opportunities to hear different types of literature read aloud, along with opportunities to discuss ideas about the literature and to author texts in different genres, has benefits for today's students that should not be ignored. Opportunities to transform grand conversations into grand creations are just the beginning. Motivating students to own the love of learning can yield results that are realized for years to come.

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COLE, J. (1986). *The magic school bus at the waterworks.* New York: Scholastic.

COLE, J. (1987). *The magic school bus inside the earth*. New York: Scholastic.

COLE, J. (1989). *The magic school bus inside the human body*. New York: Scholastic.

COLE, J. (1990). *The magic school bus lost in the solar system*. New York: Scholastic.

Cole, J. (1992). *The magic school bus on the ocean floor.* New York: Scholastic.
Cole, J. (1994). *The magic school bus in the land of the dinosaurs.* New York: Scholastic.
Craig, J.M. (1977). *The donkey prince.* New York: Doubleday.
Juster, N. (1961). *The phantom tollbooth.* New York: Bullseye Books.
Kobrin, B. (1988). *Eyeopeners.* New York: Penguin Books.
Lowry, L. (1993). *The giver.* Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.
McLaughlin, P. (1985). *Sarah, plain and tall.* New York: Harper & Row.
McNulty, F. (1979). *How to dig a hole to the other side of the world.* New York: Harper & Row.

Appendix A

Information books and infotainment books on selected topics.

Earth Science:

Bains, R. (1985). *Rocks and minerals.* Mahwah,NJ: Troll Associates.
Cole, J. (1987). *The magic school bus inside the earth.* New York: Scholastic, Inc.
McNulty, F. (1979). *How to dig a hole to the other side of the world.* New York: Scholastic.

Space Science:

Branley, F.M. (1981). *The planets in our solar system.* New York: The Trumpet Club.
Branley, F.M. (1986). *Journey into a black hole.* New York: Harper & Row.
Cole, J. (1990). *The magic school bus lost in the solar system.* New York: Scholastic.

Physiology/ Human Body:

Cole, J. (1989). *The magic school bus inside the human body.* New York: Scholastic.
Showers, P. (1970). *What happens to a hamburger.* (Nonfiction response journal entries.) New York: The Trumpet Club.

Appendix B

Sample informational storybooks to read aloud.

Branley, F.M. (1986). *Journey into a black hole.* New York: Harper & Row.
Carle, E. (1987). *The tiny seed.* New York: Scholastic.
Cole, J. (1989). *The magic school bus inside the human body.* New York: Scholastic.
Cole, J. (1990). *The magic school bus lost in the solar system.* New York: Scholastic.
DePaola, T. (1977). *Quicksand.* New York: Holiday House.
DePaola, T. (1978). *The popcorn book.* New York: Holiday House.
McNulty, F. (1974). *Woodchuck.* New York: Harper & Row.
McNulty, F. (1979). *How to dig a hole to the other side of the world.* New York: Harper & Row.
Phleger, F. (1961). *Red Tag comes back.* New York: Harper & Row.
Rockwell, A., & Rockwell, H. (1979). *Blackout.* New York: Macmillan.
Selsam, M. (1959). *Seeds and more seeds.* New York: Harper & Row.
Selsam, M. (1960). *Plenty of fish.* New York: Harper & Row.

PART III

CREATING THE CLIMATE: THE ROLE OF THE TEACHER

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CHAPTER 11

Pathways to Meaning Making: Fostering Intertextuality in the Classroom

Trevor H. Cairney

It was all Chlorissa's fault! Well, so Brock claimed when I asked him where he got the idea for the piece he had written. Brock was a kindergarten student in rural Australia. On my first day in his classroom (which I was to visit weekly for a full year), I had observed him eagerly writing in a "magic cave" constructed as a retreat area. When I had stopped to ask him the source of his inspiration for his writing, he replied, "Well, it was like Chlorissa. That book (*The Enchanted Wood*, Blyton, 1939) had children who moved to the country. I changed it around...like she wrote a Faraway story...I decided to write one too."

I was confused. Was it Chlorissa, or was it Inta (Brock's teacher) who had been reading the book *The Enchanted Wood?* It was Chlorissa's piece that moved Brock to write, but it was Inta's reading of Blyton's book that had influenced them both. This reading of the Blyton book was part of both children's intertextual history, yet so was the piece written by Chlorissa. Literacy events like this underscore the importance of a person's experience with multiple texts as well as the conversations about these texts. This example was intertextuality in action.

Intertextuality is the process of interpreting and constructing one text by means of a previously composed text (Barthes, 1979; deBeaugrande, 1980; Kristeva, 1980). Texts are composed using many different sign systems for making meaning, including reading, writing, viewing, listening, drawing, dramatization, and firsthand experiences. Every text can be linked with every other text we have ever constructed (see Hartman and Allison, this volume for an extended discussion). Many writers, painters, musicians, and actors have long been aware of the influence that previous textual experiences have on a person's compositions. For example, children's author Margaret Mahy (1987), when reflecting upon her childhood literary experiences, commented:

> I wrote because I was a reader, and wanted to relive certain reading experiences more intimately by bringing them back out of myself…books give me access to a continuous and reciprocating discussion, and the awareness of lots of things all going on simultaneously, a concurrence that seems to me to be an important aspect of truth.… I think I dissolved the books I needed and no doubt I still carry them (in solution) within me. (pp. 151–157)

Most people, if asked, will indicate that they frequently think of other books as they read. Similarly, many writers admit freely that the germs of their writing can often be traced to previous literary experiences with texts (Cairney, 1990b, 1990c). Hartman (1990, p. 2) has suggested that the concept of intertextuality is a metaphor used to describe the constant social construction and reconstruction of meaning, as readers and writers "transpose texts into other texts, absorb one text into another, and build a mosaic of intersecting texts."

Classrooms are places where students encounter a complex range of texts that interact with one another as they are read, written, viewed, discussed, or heard. An 'intertextual' world of constantly interacting meanings is created. Previous research and publications have described students' awareness of their intertextual histories, its impact upon them as readers and writers, and the way this is manifested in classrooms (see Cairney, 1988, 1990a ,1990b, 1990c, 1992). From this work it has been concluded that intertextuality is idiosyncratic; dependent on factors as diverse as text characteristics, reading purpose, and contextual influences; familiar to most readers and writers irrespective of age and ability; linked with many text features including genre, plot, characterization, and content; frequently primed by specific elements of content and plot; and, socially constructed as people read and write as extensions of human relationships (Bloome & Egan-Robertson, 1993; Cairney, 1985, 1988, 1990c, 1992, in press).

However, the focus of this chapter is not the nature of intertextuality, but how intertextual meanings develop and the role that talk plays in this complex process of meaning making. All literacy events are, in essence, social events (Cairney & Langbien, 1989). Chlorissa and Brock's use of prior texts was influenced and shaped by the complex relationships between participants in this literacy environment. The choices we make as literacy learners, our literary preferences, and our interests are all inextricably linked with the relationships that characterize our world.

"Texts are composed using many different sign systems for making meaning, including reading, writing, viewing, listening, drawing, dramatization, and firsthand experiences."

THE CENTRALITY OF TALK TO LITERACY

Classrooms are places filled with talk that has varied functions, audiences, and genres. Some of this talk is sanctioned classroom talk, accepted by both the teacher and the students as part of the teaching and learning process. Other talk is seen as *inter*personal in nature—necessary to building relationships, but not necessary or central to learning. There is also talk that I would refer to as 'underground' talk which is not sanctioned by the teacher, but part of the interpersonal worlds of students. Yet, in spite of segmenting the world of classroom talk, all talk is central to learning. A great deal of classroom talk centers around text and is integral to the meanings that members of the class construct as they read and write and talk about reading and writing.

The teacher is a frequent talker in most classrooms, although as Gutierrez (1993) has pointed out, the form of teacher talk used can vary greatly. Nevertheless, the teacher's talk and the way it fosters or hinders the development of students' talk is an important influence on the building of students' intertextual meanings. This chapter explores the complex role the teacher plays in the classroom as a frequent 'talker' and as a facilitator of "text talk"; talk about the texts written, read, viewed, experienced, and heard in classrooms (Cairney, 1992). Teacher talk is implicated in much of the meaning making that occurs in classrooms and influences the building of rich textual meanings as students encounter written language.

The close relationship of spoken language to literacy and learning has long been recognized (by Barnes, Britton, & Rosen, 1971; Bernstein, 1971, 1973; Britton, 1970; Edwards & Furlong, 1978; Green, 1979; Green & Dixon, 1993; Halliday, 1978). Oral and written language, while linguistically different, are interwoven with each other in the life of the classroom. It is virtually impossible to read or write in classrooms without talking. Conversely, talking often leads to reading and writing. Spoken and written language are closely related aspects of classroom discourse (Cairney, 1995).

Furthermore, one learns about literacy within a social context, as an extension of relationships with other people. The texts we read, write, draw, and view are implicated in social relations. We learn to read and write by "being apprenticed to a social group" (Gee, 1990, p. 45). Hence, the meanings we construct as we read and write reflect who we are, what we have experienced, what we know about language and the world, and also what our purposes are for creating the meanings in the first place (Cairney, 1990a, 1990b, 1995).

> ***"Classrooms are places where students encounter a complex range of texts that interact with one another as they are read, written, viewed, discussed,or heard."***

Classrooms are places where knowledge is constructed with specific interactions between participants as part of the teaching and learning process and as teachers and students live out their daily lives. Since schools and classes may share many specific characteristics, they are all reflective of the specific background of their students and teachers, as are the texts that are acknowledged and valued in their classrooms.

> **“*The texts we read, write, draw, and view are implicated in social relations.*”**

It is clear that negotiation is an important part of this unique classroom life. Fernie, Davies, Kantor and McMurray (1993) argue that classroom life involves constant negotiation between participants. Participants negotiate roles, rights, obligations, norms, and expectations from different positions. Heap (1991) points out that teachers and their students define together the content of their learning, the situated roles, the relationships, and the definitions of what is considered knowledge.

This has been illustrated by Gutierrez (1993), who found, when studying the effects of writing process instruction on elementary and secondary aged Latino children, that differences across classrooms were characterized by particular participation structures. She found that the various patterns of social action, discourse, and classroom activities formed “scripts” of three main types. The first was labeled *recitation* and was characterized by a large degree of teacher direction and limited opportunities for students to interact with and receive help from peers. The second she called *responsive*; although still very much “teacher managed,” it allowed for far more relaxed activity boundaries and participation structures with student responses being solicited and encouraged, and opportunities for students to build on the responses of others. The third was labelled *responsive/collaborative* and was characterized by a highly dynamic interactive learning context in which both the discourse and the knowledge were more frequently jointly constructed. In this type of classroom, the teacher acknowledged student contributions more regularly, and writing was seen “...not as a method, or a set of activities, but rather as a socially negotiated process of constructing oral and written texts, of interacting with others about texts, and of generating texts” (Gutierrez, 1993, p. 345).

The teacher has a vital part to play in the construction of classroom discourse. Through their actions, teachers signal what they see as appropriate actions, what roles are possible (and are valued), how students assume roles, and what counts as appropriate literacy activities in the classroom (Heap, 1980).

What does this mean for classroom talk and in particular, for the teacher's role in this talk? In this chapter, two of the issues that have significance for our classroom practice will be highlighted. First, the way classroom language is controlled and directed by the teacher ultimately affects the way students interact with text, talk about text, and construct meanings. Second, the various patterns of social interaction and classroom activities sanctioned by the teacher inevitably place limits on the type of knowledge and literacy constructed and used in the classroom.

THE TEACHER'S ROLE

We cannot talk about the role of talk in the classroom without considering its role within learning. As indicated earlier in this chapter, there is a close relationship between language and learning. The work of Rogoff (1990) and Vygotsky (1978) is helpful in explaining this relationship and in considering the teacher's role. Rogoff (1990, p. 7) uses the metaphor of "apprenticeship" to describe how children learn. She suggests that children are apprentices in thinking:

> ...active in their efforts to learn from observing and participating with peers and more skilled members of their society, developing skills to handle culturally defined problems with available tools, and building from these givens to construct new solutions within the context of sociocultural activity.

Rogoff's work, in turn, is based on the work of a number of psychologists whose theories are socially based, in particular, Vygotsky (1978). Central to Vygotsky's work is his assertion that learning moves from an initial form of guided learning to later independent learning. He proposed that there are two developmental levels. The first, he termed "actual development" and defined as "the level of development of a child's mental functions...determined by independent problem solving" (p. 86). That is, what a child can do alone at a particular point in time. The second, he termed "potential development," and described what a person can achieve if given the benefit of support during the task. It is the ability to solve problems "under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (p. 86).

Vygotsky (1978) suggested that there is always a difference between these two forms of development and that this gap, the "Zone of Proximal Development" (ZPD) indicates the functions "...that have not yet matured but are in the process of maturation" (p. 86). It is the ZPD that is critical for learning and instruction. He argued that learning creates the zone of proximal development; it "awakens a variety of internal development processes that are able to operate only when the child is interacting with people in his environment and in cooperation with his peers. Once these processes are internalized, they become part of the child's independent developmental achievement" (p. 90).

But how is this learning fostered, and what is the teacher's role in it? It is here that Bruner's (1983; 1986) concept of scaffolding becomes useful to explain the process. Bruner described scaffolding as a process whereby an adult helps a student by doing what the child cannot do alone, and then slowly encouraging him or her to take over parts of the text construction process as he or she is able. I describe scaffolding a little more broadly by extending its use beyond adults. I see scaffolding as the behavior of any person that is designed to help another person engage in some aspect of learning beyond their actual level of development (Cairney, 1995).

A complementary concept to scaffolding is Rogoff's notion of *guided participation*. It is useful to help explain the role that teachers play in children's meaning making. Rogoff (1990) suggests that:

> ...both guidance and participation in culturally valued activities are essential to children's apprenticeship in thinking. Guidance may be tacit or explicit, and participation may vary in the extent to which children or caregivers are responsible for its arrangement. (p. 8)

In Rogoff's opinion, guided participation involves children and others in a collaborative process of "building bridges" from children's present understanding and skills in order to reach new understandings and skills. This in turn requires "the arranging and structuring of children's participation in activities" (1990, p. 8). Obviously, talk is central to guided participation.

The relationship of Rogoff's concept of guided participation to Vygotsky's work should be obvious. Of critical importance to guided participation is Vygotsky's concept of intersubjectivity. This is the process humans engage in when collaborating. It involves a sharing of focus and purpose between a child and another more skilled or knowledgeable person. This is essentially a process that involves cognitive, social, and emotional exchange between participants in learning, mostly through talk.

The way these concepts are applied in classrooms is critical. It is obvious that some teaching styles do not encourage the development of intersubjectivity, nor do they in any way demonstrate Rogoff's notion of guided participation. For example, the various teaching scripts identified by Gutierrez (1993) that were discussed earlier in this chapter would seem to offer different potential for guided participation to occur and for intersubjectivity to develop. These scripts are also associated with different use of talk by the teacher. For example, teachers who employ recitation scripts and who provide only limited opportunities for students to interact with and receive help from peers would reduce dramatically the opportunities for guided participation to occur (Cairney, 1995).

The works of Vygotsky and Rogoff have obvious implications for classroom practice. Although not providing any justification for a single methodology, this theoretical work provides a basis for instructional decisions which, when viewed alongside my earlier points relating to language, provide a number of guiding principles (Cairney, 1995).

- Instruction and curriculum should be directed at a level just beyond the child's current level of development.
- The teacher should construct learning environments that permit students to attempt tasks with the help and support of the teacher and other learners.

- Teachers have an important responsibility to observe the learning of students, to determine their actual and potential levels of development, and to identify their zones of proximal development.
- Teachers must create learning environments that provide positive demonstrations of literacy. Students need to observe other readers and writers using literacy in ways that are beyond the student's level of actual development.
- Teachers should create classroom contexts that permit the teacher and students to build bridges between present understanding and new skills and understanding.
- Classroom environments should permit intersubjectivity to develop and should be viewed as communities of learners.

THE ROLE OF TALK: DESIGNING CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

What should be obvious from this discussion is that there is a close relationship between talk and literacy. Moreover, the teacher has a vital role to play in student growth and development. This occurs explicitly through the instruction they give and the ways in which they offer information, question students, or just talk about texts and learning. It occurs implicitly through the teacher's demonstrations of literacy and learning, by the things he or she values, and by the way the learning environment is constructed in classrooms.

The concepts of scaffolding and guided participation already introduced in this chapter are obviously of critical importance to any discussion concerning the teacher's role in student learning. Adults influence children's learning by providing access to and regulating the difficulty of tasks and by structuring their involvement in learning situations through joint participation. The essence of teaching is the creation of "supported situations" in which children extend current skills and knowledge (Rogoff, 1991). Scaffolding is a vital part of these supported situations. But what does scaffolding look like in classroom terms? How does the teacher provide scaffolding support as part of guided participation in the day to day activities of the classroom?

> *"Adults influence children's learning by providing access to and regulating the difficulty of tasks and by structuring their involvement in learning situations through joint participation."*

An effective literacy program should be a blueprint for providing scaffolding for literacy learners.

Wood, Bruner and Ross (1976) describe six functions that are typically associated with scaffolding for the teacher: recruiting the child's interest in the task as it is defined by the teacher, reducing the number of steps involved in the solution of the problem by simplifying the task, maintaining the pursuit of the goal through motivation of the child and direction of the activity, noting inconsistencies between what the child has produced and the ideal solution or outcome, controlling frustration and risk during problem solving, and demonstrating an idealized version of the act or skill to be performed. These six functions might be fulfilled in the following ways as part of a literacy program that includes discussion.

- *Raising interest in literacy* is achieved through the shared reading of literature and other text forms, the use of structured and unstructured opportunities for response to reading and writing, and the provision of individual and group conferences as vehicles for discussion of common interests.
- *Simplifying the task of reading and writing* occurs in many ways, including teacher support through individual and small group conferences, the use of minilessons in specific skill areas, the joint construction of texts, and the shared reading and discussion of texts that are beyond individual reading levels.
- *Maintaining the pursuit of the goal* is dependent on many formal and informal strategies including encouragement through individual conferences, the keeping of records by the students and the teacher, and the individual encouragement that results from author's chair sessions and celebration of authorship.
- *Noting inconsistencies in the children's reading and writing* is the responsibility of the teacher, but students also have a role to play through conferences and their responses to the work of others. The teacher's role is performed through individual conferences, by observing student work, and by encouraging students to keep a personal record of their reading and writing.
- *Controlling frustration and risk during problem solving* is an ongoing concern and is dependent on the creation of a positive and relaxed atmosphere that is not based on competition between students. The provision of independent reading and writing offers students the opportunity to pursue personal interests and goals in literacy. The teacher provides a variety of forms of support to students when engaged in reading and writing including the use of conferences, minilessons, and questioning.
- *Demonstrating the act of reading and writing* occurs constantly in this classroom as students share their reading and writing with one another, as texts are read and written by the teacher, as the teacher demonstrates response to the reading and writing of others, and as the classroom environment becomes a vibrant site for talk about literacy and its role in learning.

These activities are reflective of a particular approach to literacy instruction in which talk about written texts is considered a vital component of literacy learning. Instead of the didactic teacher-directed classroom discourse that characterizes many classrooms described by Gutierrez (1993) as *recitation* scripts, this type of program is based on an expectation that a *responsive/collaborative* script would be dominant. The teacher would create a classroom characterized by a highly dynamic interactive learning context in which both the discourse and the knowledge were jointly constructed more frequently. In this type of classroom, the teacher more regularly acknowledges student contributions, and reading and writing would be seen not as methods or a set of activities, but rather as "...socially negotiated process(es) of constructing oral and written texts, of interacting with others about texts, and of generating texts" (Gutierrez, 1993, p. 345).

The starting point for the approach outlined above is a concern to construct meaning that is relevant and important to the students themselves. In such a classroom students are encouraged to take risks as they make meaning, without confining themselves to the narrow parameters defined by the teacher. Therefore, literacy activities are never set simply for the sake of completing a literacy task. Rather, literacy is seen as a vehicle for learning. Social interaction and talk are also central to the classroom practices described. Interactions between classroom members are encouraged, providing frequent opportunities for collaboration with other students and for group learning. Students are given the opportunity to share their insights and discoveries about language.

The approach to literacy instruction discussed in this chapter attempts to achieve the creation of a community of readers and writers in which reading, writing, and talking about reading and writing are seen as part of the social fabric of the classroom (Cairney & Langbien, 1989). In such a classroom students are given interactive opportunities like those described for Chlorissa and Brock at the start of this chapter. They are apprenticed into meaning making, and not only receive support from others but contribute to the complex processes of guided participation that all students receive. Students engage in one another's intertextual worlds. This allows them to build meanings as shared textual understandings and insights, as extensions of their relationships with other people, and as part of their daily learning. These classrooms offer students multiple pathways to literacy as they explore issues of personal relevance, making meaning as they use language to explore their worlds.

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CHAPTER 12

Creating a Response-Centered Curriculum with Literature Discussion Groups

MaryEllen Vogt

> Our teachers come to class,
> And they talk and they talk,
> Til their faces are like peaches,
> We don't;
> We just sit like cornstalks.
>
> (Cazden, 1976, p. 74)

These poignant words from a Navajo child describe a classroom as she sees it. The teacher talks, and the student sits and most likely answers questions. However, at the core of Vygotsky's theories is the notion that social interaction encourages and promotes thinking (Vygotsky, 1978). Through social interactions, students develop language, creating a structure for future interactions and involvement. These language skills are further enhanced by the belief that what a student has to say is worth hearing. In effective classrooms where students are encouraged to talk, careful listening can be viewed as support and guidance and as taking students' ideas seriously (Wells, 1986). This chapter will detail how teachers can plan and organize these interactions, whereby students are encouraged and expected to respond to what they read and write through meaningful discussions.

BACKGROUND

In traditional classroom settings, interactions are governed by rules. The classroom culture, situation, and participants help determine the type of interaction, but most often the rules for interaction are set by the teacher with rights and obligations for the speakers.

Frames of reference are developed throughout the school year with students evaluated as to their participation (Cazden, 1986). The primary speaker is the teacher; the nature of the talk is questioning, and many interactions center around the correctness of student work, since school is traditionally viewed as a workplace rather than a place of socialization. This classroom climate "creates teachers who interrogate rather than teach, who assess rather than assist" (Duffy, 1982, p. 6). The teacher is likely to ask as many as 80,000 questions each school year, while his or her students will ask an average of 10 questions apiece (Watson & Young, 1986). Classroom interactions, when transcribed, frequently resemble the script of a play with the teacher and students alternating turns to speak.

A RESPONSE-CENTERED CLASSROOM

In many of today's elementary and secondary classrooms there has been a shift toward more interaction, more collaboration, and more participation (Cooper, 1993; Short & Pierce, 1990; Villaume, Worden, Williams, Hopkins, & Rosenblatt, 1994). Students construct meaning from what they read through articulating their responses by writing or talking. The resulting transaction between the reader and text results in meaning making (Rosenblatt, 1991). These responses, though individual and personal, are clarified, altered, strengthened, and enhanced when they are shared with others, and variety and approximation rather than correctness are the desired outcomes (see Almasi, this volume; Macon, Buell, & Vogt, 1991; Routman, 1991; Vogt, 1991). As Purves, Rogers, and Soter (1990) have noted, the classroom becomes response centered, because of the following:

- Students feel secure in their responses to what they read and are not dependent on someone else's interpretation.
- Students know why they respond as they do to a piece of text, what they bring to the text, and what the author contributes to the text.
- Students respect the differing responses of others.
- Students recognize similarities between their own responses and those of other people.

Classroom interaction can change as the teacher releases conversational control to the students, as exemplified in the following transcript.

Sara: In the book *The Count of Monte Cristo*, what caused Eugenie to flee?

Juan: She was going to marry Benedetto...is that wrong? I'm wondering...

Jeff: It's not right...she wanted to run away from her parents, I think.

Teacher: Look at Tricia because she has the answer to this, obviously. Tricia seems to think there's a little bit more to this.

Tricia: Yeah...

Alex: Wait, I know! Benedetto was convicted as a criminal, so you know the cops were going to arrest him so he was shamed. In other words, Eugenie's family was shamed 'cause they were supposed to, uh, marry the count...so that's why she ran away...

Teacher: Are you satisfied with that?

Sara: Yeah, okay, good, but I'm still wondering why Madame Danglars and Duprey met in secret at the hotel...

Teacher: Interesting thought. They had been meeting in secret for a long time...

Alex: Okay, they're meeting and she brought Duprey a letter that Monsieur Danglars left her and he told her that he was leaving town...

Carla: No, I think...

(Vogt, 1988, p. 88)

Turning over conversational control to students takes some risk-taking on the part of the teacher and considerable practice on the part of students. Simply telling students to discuss will likely be unsuccessful. One student may monopolize while another says nothing; some students will have read the material while others will have not; a few will wander off the subject; and some may respond with cautious, predictable comments or an apathetic "I don't know." How literature discussion groups are planned, organized, and monitored is critical to their success in a response-centered classroom.

PLANNING FOR DISCUSSION GROUPS

Although the previous transcripts of classroom interactions are with older students, discussion groups can be used at nearly all grade levels. The key is how they are organized and monitored (Cooper, 1993; Villaume et al., 1994). Before beginning, three questions must be considered: (a) What social skills must students develop to enable them to participate effectively? (b) How is a text selected? (c) How should groups be arranged?

WHAT SOCIAL SKILLS MUST STUDENTS DEVELOP TO ENABLE THEM TO PARTICIPATE EFFECTIVELY?

Depending on the age of your students, this question may or may not require a great deal of thought. Very young children who have not spent time in discussion will need modeling, role-playing, and assistance. Older students will benefit from brainstorming and learn what it takes to have a good discussion and how participants make a discussion work. Most likely, students will respond that people must listen to each other, speak in turn

Figure 1
Looks Like/Sounds Like/Feels Like chart.

Social Skill: **Listening**

Looks Like	Sounds Like	Feels Like
heads are nodding	one person is speaking	I am important
people are interested	a "busy buzz"	what I have to say is important
people are leaning forward	questions and answers	what I think matters
there is eye contact	appropriate disagreement	I can help others figure things out
people are taking turns	people reading and learning	good

(Note: The "Feels Like" column may be eliminated for older students.)

without interrupting, be prepared, and learn to disagree appropriately. Following this brainstorming, the group then completes a Looks Like/Sounds Like/Feels Like chart. Beginning with one social skill such as "Listening," students brainstorm what a discussion group will look like and sound like when it is operating well (see Figure 1). Other social skills, such as those previously mentioned, are discussed in the same manner. Occasionally, with young children it is necessary to have students role play each of the appropriate social skills. Charts posted in the classroom can serve as points of reminder later if a group is having difficulty. As all teachers know, skills of cooperation are not developed overnight; thus, preliminary instruction on how to participate as a good discussant is of critical importance.

HOW IS A TEXT SELECTED?

Text selection for discussion groups should be flexible. Selection can involve using different pieces of literature at the same time, or selection can focus on using the same piece for all groups. In fact, it is even possible for discussion to center on several pieces of text within one group (see Guthrie & McCann, this volume; Hartman & Allison, this volume). The selection of the literature should depend on the purpose of the group's discussion, students' interests and abilities as discussants, and the nature of the questions, statements, or concepts to be discussed.

ONE BOOK FOR ALL. If the entire class is discussing one particular book that is either read by you (aloud) or by the students (aloud or silently), try discussion questions that promote group predictions specifically related to the book's topics and events. The groups may be cooperative, self-selected, or heterogeneous as to abilities, leadership, behavior, and participation. Discussion questions can be predetermined by the teacher or brainstormed by the class. Group membership may rotate for various chapters of a book or a group may remain together until the book's completion. One caution: rotating too frequently may prevent group cohesion; staying together too long may result in group fatigue.

> ***"Group membership may rotate for various chapters of a book or a group may remain together until the book's completion."***

SELF-SELECTED BOOKS. If you wish to incorporate small group discussion into thematic instruction, a number of theme-related books may be chosen (see Guthrie & McCann, this volume; Hartman & Allison, this volume). First, you might present each book to students by doing a book talk at the beginning of the week (or at the start of the theme), and then have students sign up for the book of their choice on a first come, first served basis. If there is only one book being used, the reading and discussion may take place within the group as sections are read aloud by group members and followed by discussion. If there are multiple copies of the book or story, the reading activity may take place at home, in class as a silent reading activity, or as a partner activity prior to the class discussion. Questions for these discussions generally are generic in nature and deal with theme concepts. The advantage is the number of times the books may be rotated from group to group.

If students self-select books for silent reading, discussion may also be beneficial. Generic questions, which cover various genres, topics and concepts, enable students to compare and contrast aspects of different books.

HOW SHOULD GROUPS BE ARRANGED?

Groups may vary in size and structure according to the outcomes desired by the teacher and students. Generally, heterogeneous groups of three or five work well; three students working together in the early stages may be the easiest to manage, with an eventual goal of five students per group. Groups of four often pair off and are less desirable. There are many factors that will help determine the best grouping arrangement: the ages and abilities of your students, the difficulty of the text material, and the specific purposes and goals for the day's discussion group.

MANAGING DISCUSSION GROUPS

Once you have considered the three previous questions, you must determine your role in the discussion activity (Villaume et al., 1994). If the goal is to decrease teacher talk and increase student participation, you may become more of a facilitator than an inquisitor (see Wiencek, this volume, for an extended discussion). Eventually, when groups are able to function with little monitoring, you may wish to join a group as a participant. In this role, try to expand student responses rather than evaluate them. Comments like "How did you get that idea?" or "I'd not even considered that thought. Had any of you?" will promote more critical thinking than the more common, "Good idea." Also, position yourself in the group in such a way that all comments are not directed through you. You can then promote interaction between students while diverting comments seeking validation. In some cases it may be necessary to avert your eyes so students will talk to one another instead of you.

MODELING

It is also important to model effective discussion skills such as listening, questioning, responding, and referring to the text for examples and clarification. As the students begin to trust your involvement more as a participant than as an evaluator, the conversational flow is likely to change dramatically.

GROUP MANAGEMENT

Another technique that helps increase student participation is to assign group member responsibilities. The roles that are appropriate for discussion groups include: recorder, time-keeper, facilitator, summarizer, and evaluator. Each of the students has a specific task and, as these are rotated through the group, students begin to understand how an effective group functions. In some groups, however, the assigning of responsibilities can deteriorate into "Kendra is being too bossy as facilitator" or "Daniel isn't summarizing what we said." Therefore, the teacher must exercise caution when deciding if role assignments are appropriate.

COACHING

When groups have difficulty staying on task, working together, or sharing their ideas, your role may need to change back to "teacher," but that can still be done within the discussion format. For example, if one person is monopolizing a conversation, you may refer the group back to the Looks Like/Sounds Like charts to determine if all group members are having the opportunity to participate. If a group is getting rowdy, you may refer them to the "listening" chart in terms of whether the group "sounds like" a group that is discussing things effectively. Obviously, this all depends on the group members' ages and the nature of the group. As students become more adept at facilitating and participating, their interests turn to defending their positions and stating their beliefs. One side benefit is a decrease in off-task behaviors.

Villaume et al. (1994) indicate they teach discussion skills by first having students identify topic ideas or "seeds" they would like to discuss about the book they are reading together. As the teacher facilitates discussion of each seed, she promotes an exploration of the students' ideas before moving to the next one. This structure provides the necessary scaffold; eventually, the student-generated seeds take the place of many of the teacher-generated discussion questions.

GENERATING DISCUSSION THROUGH TEACHER-GENERATED QUESTIONS

It is important to note at this point that although discussion is fun for students and teachers alike and promotes meaning making and confidence, it should also lead to more strategic reading by students. Therefore, the nature of the discussion topics and questions should promote critical, strategic thinking. Dole, Duffy, Roehler and Pearson (1991) suggest that strategic readers are able to determine importance, to summarize, to infer/predict, to generate questions about what they read, and to monitor their comprehension. However, trying to attach specific questions or activities to each of these reader strategies is inauthentic since, as readers, we integrate all of them each time we read. Still, as you begin to determine discussion questions and ideas, keep in mind that particular questions can lead to more strategic thinking by your students. For example, by asking very young children to describe their favorite part of a story or their favorite character, you are aiding them in determining importance. Likewise, if you ask older students to discuss how the story or book would be altered if the time and place had been changed, you are encouraging a discussion about the importance of setting. Having students make group predictions about what they think will happen next in a chapter book assists them in making inferences and in monitoring their own comprehension. All of these strategies may be reinforced through the careful writing of discussion questions. Therefore, although there should be time for students to talk informally about topics that interest them, for the most part discussion should have a specific purpose (see Commeyras, Sherrill, & Wuenker, this volume, for an extended discussion of students' questions).

For example, the following questions (Baker, 1992) focus on a story or book's form and structure, drawing special attention to story elements. For younger children, these questions could be revised (for instance, Were you surprised at the end of the story? If so, why?).

- Did the story end as you expected it to? Did the author prepare you to expect the ending? How?
- Suppose we thought of a different ending for the story. How would the rest of the story have to be changed for the new ending?
- What does the author do to begin the story? Suppose that the opening were changed or removed. How would the rest of the story be changed?

- What kind of person is the principal character? Did he or she change during the course of the story? How? What caused the change?
- Suppose this or that character were removed from the story. How would the story be changed?
- Suppose the order of events were changed? What would happen to the story? Would it be a new story or no story at all?
- Where does the story take place? It if took place somewhere else or in a different time, how would it be changed?
- What does the author do to create suspense, to make you want to read on to find out what happened?
- Every story writer creates a make-believe world and fills it with characters. Even where the world is far different from your own (as in fantasy), how does the author make his story seem possible and probable?
- What signs and signals indicate that a story will be fanciful rather than realistic? Funny rather than serious?
- In what ways is this story and its characters like others you have read, heard, or seen?

PRESENTING THE QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

One way to post questions for the day's discussion is on a response chart (Cooper, 1993). The questions are written on tag board sentence strips and then put in a pocket chart or affixed with Velcro to a poster board used specifically for this purpose. The generic questions can then be saved and used again, giving the students additional practice at a later date. Those questions that are story-specific can be interspersed with the generic ones, depending on your purpose and the nature of the story. It is important to always include the recommendation for students to discuss their favorite parts or to try to make connections to their own lives (for example, "How does this book relate to your life?") (Cooper, 1993, p. 372). Using a response chart sends a message to students that discussion is an important aspect of being a good reader and writer because it is a regular part of the language arts curriculum. The response chart formalizes the process.

Another way to promote active discussion is by using literature logs to generate ideas and organize student thinking during reading and before discussion. The students' written logs are brought to the discussion group and are used as catalysts for remembering details and generating ideas about the story. In the logs, students summarize each section of the story or book as they read, noting items of importance, issues of concern, or questions they have. The seeds mentioned earlier may also be generated from the literature logs (Villaume et al., 1994). These logs are especially valuable as students gain more facility with discussion and begin to move away from teacher-generated questions to notions of their own which they may wish to ponder and share.

An activity that provides a great impetus to discussion is the Discussion Web (Whisler & Williams, 1990). The steps for creating a Discussion Web include:

1. After students read a selection, they discuss with partners "yes or no" questions that may be answered partly by reading the text and partly through their own experiences.
2. The partners must give evidence that supports a "yes" position and and also a "no" position (see Figure 2). Opinions are fine as long as they are supported by information from the text or by personal experience.
3. The partners join the other members of their discussion group and share their responses. Together, they reach consensus on a pro or con point of view. These are then shared with the entire class. Written arguments as well as debates can follow.

Figure 2
Discussion web.

Yes		No
They are soft to lean on.	Would sheep make good pets?	They're too big.
They would be fun.		They eat too much.
They're cute.		They are messy.
They're my size.		They are noisy.
They're easy to hold on to.		They are stinky.

> *“Literature discussion groups can provide a focus for using trade books in addition to basal stories.”*

The Discussion Web may be used with students of all ages. Very young children might discuss the merits of whether the sheep in Shaw's books (*Sheep in a Jeep*, 1986, *Sheep on a Ship*, 1989, *Sheep in a Shop*, 1991, *Sheep Out to Eat*, 1992) would make good pets, or whether children who are different can be good friends (see Fleming's *Be Good to Eddie Lee*, 1993). Older students might debate the merits of current events issues, political questions or decisions that were made in years past (for example, “Given the information he had, should General George Custer have mounted his attack?”). The Discussion Web works equally well with narrative and expository text.

Concluding the Discussion

After students have completed their discussion, generally after 10 to 20 minutes, students may benefit from summarizing in one or two sentences the most important points they discussed; these may then be shared with the entire class. Resist adding more follow-up activities to a discussion. They are unnecessary if the discussion has been successful and productive and they may inhibit students' enjoyment of the experience. If there is great excitement about a particular story or book, students may wish to respond further, but this should be kept to a minimum.

It may be beneficial for students to evaluate their group's participation and cooperation. Some teachers have students complete a literature group assessment in which they decide among themselves how well they took turns, listened, and shared. This may be informal discussion or it may be more formal, such as a checklist or evaluation form that is completed and signed by the students (see Figure 3).

Conclusion

Literature discussion groups need to be viewed as integral to a literature-based language arts program, whether a teacher subscribes to whole language perspectives or tends to be more skill-based. For those teachers who wish to make changes in their teaching by gradually incorporating aspects of whole language, literature discussion groups can provide a focus for using trade books in addition to basal stories. However, it is important to mention that not every discussion will be productive and not all students will immediately embrace discussion as the type of

Figure 3
Literature discussion group evaluation.

Names of group members: ____
____

Date: __________ Title of story/book discussed: ______________________________

1. Each group member participated:
   _____ about the right amount _____ too much _____ too little
2. The topic our group discussed the best was: __________________________
   ____
3. One question we have about our story/book is: _______________________
   ____
4. The discussion and cooperation skills our group used particularly well include: __________
   ____
5. The discussion and cooperation skills our group needs help with include: ______________
   ____
6. Overall, we evaluate today's group discussion as:
   _____ Outstanding _____ Very good _____ Okay _____ Not so good

---

(adapted from Linda Hoyt, 1993)

process they prefer. Therefore, it is important to use discussion groups as one type of response activity. Others, of course, include journal writing, projects, art and music extensions, and other cross-curricular connections.

Whatever the response, we must remember to rely less on interrogation and more on sharing. By viewing discussion groups as a flexible tool, you may choose either a loosely organized format or a more structured format with specific guidelines. Either way, during discussion, remember the following: (a) ask fewer known-answer questions; (b) activate and utilize students' prior experiences; (c) respond openly to students' statements; (d) connect student discourse by building upon previous comments; and (e) provide a nonthreatening atmosphere conducive to the free exchange of thoughts and ideas (Goldenberg, 1993).

Literature discussion groups are intended to be fun, productive, satisfying, strategically oriented, and thought-provoking. Out of discussions can come insights that will unlikely be generated by worksheets or workbook pages. When we listen to students' ideas about how the world works, we need to react to them honestly, thoughtfully, and carefully. We thereby turn over to our students the right to question, critique, investigate, and wonder. Rather than sitting as "quiet cornstalks," students learn to express themselves, support perspectives, advocate positions, and defend beliefs. When this occurs, we establish a response-centered curriculum in which conversational control is shared among teachers and students alike.

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CHAPTER 13

Response-Centered Talk: Windows on Children's Thinking

Lea M. McGee

In an elementary school in Boston, Massachusetts, USA, Ms. Christine Antos reads *Rosie's Walk* (Hutchins, 1968) aloud to her first graders. Later, she gathers a small group of children in the book talk center in their classroom (a small space sectioned off from the classroom by a rug and a hanging screen) while the other children are busy completing tasks in additional centers in the classroom. Ms. Antos begins the conversation by asking: "Who has something to say about *Rosie's Walk*?"

Carlos: I like when he gets stinged. He running. All those bees get out. And I like another one. The part in the haystack. It's funny. You could get a lot of hay on you.

Israel: I like the part when the fox he keeps on trying to get the hen but he doesn't.

Teacher: I wonder why he never got the hen.

Israel: Because she, she comes over and the fox can't.

Carlos: The fox trips.

Teacher: So the hen can do things the fox can't do and the fox keeps tripping himself.

Meredith: Um, well, um, I kind of like it when he falls in the hay. The cow made a funny face.

Shamir: I like when, um, when I think the flour got fell on him.

Takiya: When he kept tripping and stuff and she, she got away in time for dinner and he never could catch her because she was tiny and she could go over things.

Teacher:	I liked it that the hen kept getting away, too.
Takiya:	Cause she, um, um, because she, [he] didn't need to be eating animals.
Benjamin:	I like the part where she just runs through the beehives
Teacher:	Paul?
Paul:	I like the part when the fox got hit by the rake.
Teacher:	Jimmy?
Jimmy:	I like that he didn't get the, um, hen.

Teachers have long recognized the value of talk in learning to read. Children talk about what they know before reading and answer questions after reading. They discuss events, characters, and themes in stories, and main ideas and supporting details in informational books. Talk provides opportunities both for children to express their thoughts and for teachers to assess children's comprehension. However, good talk can do more than provide children with a forum for showing what they know; it can provide a space for children to learn—an opportunity to develop and use reasoning and problem-solving. Through talk, children fine-tune ways of thinking about and interpreting literature.

However, not all talk in classrooms is conducive to developing thinking and interpreting. In fact, as described in Almasi (this volume), the purpose of much classroom discussion is recitation. In recitation lessons teachers expect children to demonstrate their mastery of material or procedures by reciting facts and information that they have been taught. Such discussions are useful for many educational purposes, such as demonstrating how to locate cities on maps and plot distances between cities (Cazden, 1988). The tasks to be accomplished and the information to be learned are carefully and skillfully orchestrated through the teacher's questions and reactions to students' performances.

However, in keeping with the view of discussion described by Almasi, the kind of talk that is explored in this chapter is different from recitation talk. Rather than recalling known information, its purpose is the discovery or construction of new understandings about literature. I call this kind of talk *response-centered talk*. In this chapter I describe the rationale for using response-centered talk, discuss the nature of this kind of talk, and finally make suggestions for supporting response-centered talk in the classroom.

WHY RESPONSE-CENTERED TALK?

Recently, theories from the field of reader response criticism have begun to inform reading practice. According to Rosenblatt (1978), readers construct literary meaning using the text merely as a blueprint. Literary works are filled with gaps or places in which readers must supply critical information left out by authors (Iser, 1978). When reading for aesthetic purposes, readers fill in gaps by focusing on the unique images, impressions, feelings, and reactions they bring to mind while reading. These brief and fleeting images, feelings, impressions, and thoughts work along with their respective responses to form the reader's unique and personal understanding of the literary work. They also become the foundation for interpreting literary works. Interpreting consists of making hypotheses about the significance of specific images, thoughts, feelings, impressions, or responses for understanding the whole literary work beyond the literal level.

The conversation among Ms. Antos and her children presented earlier provides an example for explaining the nature of gap-filling and interpretation. In the story *Rosie's Walk*, the text merely describes the activities of Rosie, the hen, as she walks around the barnyard and returns home in time for dinner. The illustrations depict the actions of a fox who follows Rosie and continually gets into trouble. In their conversation about the story, the teacher and her students use the illustrations as a guide for constructing an understanding of the story. However, they also discuss information provided in neither the illustrations nor the text. Israel suggests that the fox was trying to get the hen (an obvious implication from the illustration), and Carlos suggests a reason why the fox is so hapless (he keeps tripping). Meredith expands on this reasoning, suggesting why the hen can get away (because she is so tiny and could go over things). Takiya makes a judgment about the fox's motivations (he did not need to be eating animals). Drawing implications about the intentions of the fox and hypothesizing reasons why the fox never catches the hen are gap-filling activities. These gap-filling inferences are critical for the children's later interpretation of the story as shown in the next portion of their conversation. The teacher begins this part of the conversation by interjecting a question:

Teacher: Do you think that Rosie knew the fox was behind her?
Several children: No, no.
Teacher: Richard, what do you think?
Richard: I think she didn't know.
Teacher: Why?
Richard: Because she didn't turn around.
Teacher: How about you, Benjamin?
Benjamin: She never looked around her.
Teacher: She just looked straight ahead.
Jimmy: Because she would have heard, have heard him. It was like too fast for her.
Teacher: Good idea. Takiya?
Takiya: I think she didn't, I think she didn't because she never looked around her and, um, and she, um, I think she didn't know because

she never turned around and looked at her, but he at least didn't get her even though she didn't know that he was behind her. She got home just in time.

Richard: Like her eyes are always this way (pointing).

At this point in the conversation, the children are exploring an interpretation that Rosie the hen was an innocent, naive, would-be victim who was in continual danger of being captured by a fox but never aware of it. The fox seems to be quite inept (he keeps tripping) because he cannot catch this seemingly naive hen. They are using information from the illustrations to support their interpretation that the hen never knows about the fox and his intentions ("like her eyes are just this way"). Importantly, they seem to agree as a group with their interpretation.

Fish (1980) argued that group discussions about literary works are particularly important for building interpretations. According to Fish, interpretations are the significant understandings that a group of readers negotiates together and commonly agrees upon. In other words, although individual readers can construct their own interpretations of literary works, interpretive work within a group is more powerful. In a group, readers share their own understandings and significant insights and must convince others of the value of their insights. This type of negotiation involves the exchange of ideas in which readers present support for their positions and consider the arguments of others in presenting counter positions. Such activities reflect problem solving and reasoning and produce discoveries about literature that no one reader by him or herself could likely construct alone.

The remainder of the conversation among Ms. Antos and her students illustrates negotiation of a common, shared interpretation of a literary work. In this portion of the conversation, Shamir introduces a different interpretation than the one the group had just accepted.

Shamir: I think she knew.

Teacher: Why do you think she knew?

Shamir: Because, because if she didn't know she wouldn't have looked all around her, looking for stuff. I think she knew when she was getting ready to take a walk.

Teacher: Oh.

Carlos: Maybe she had a spy. Maybe that little wool on top (gestures to top of his head).

Teacher: That's an idea.

> ***"In a group, readers share their own understandings and significant insights and must convince others of the value of their insights."***

Israel: I like it when he gets sick because he's a fox. I think I know why the hen, the hen thinks the fox is not in back of her.

Teacher: Why?

Israel: Because the fox tries to catch the hen and she takes different places on her walk.

Teacher: So you think she does that on purpose?

Israel: Yeah.

Teacher: Benjamin, you have something to say?

Benjamin: He might look behind her real quick. And she did all those things by accident, I mean on purpose.

Teacher: Tiffany, go ahead.

Tiffany: She could have, could have heard the bees when they stinged the fox.

In this portion of the conversation the children explore an alternative interpretation—that the hen knew all along that the fox was following her and intentionally led him into places where he could get into trouble. They keep in mind that in the illustration the hen never seems to look around. However, Shamir makes the inference that the hen intentionally looked for places to walk and even knew the fox would follow her before she began the walk. Carlos agrees with this interpretation and offers text evidence that could account for the hen seeing the fox even when her eyes are straight ahead in the illustration—he suggests that her cockscomb could be a spying device. Tiffany offers an additional idea accounting for the hen not turning to look—the hen could have heard the commotion made by the bees as they stung the fox. Here she drew on her general knowledge that bees make noise, especially when flying in a swarm such as the one shown in the illustrations. Although the conversation ends abruptly at this point and the group never contrasts both interpretations together, they clearly have explored two alternative interpretations of the story. It also seems obvious from the conversation that the children had not explicitly thought about these interpretations prior to their conversation about the book.

WHAT IS RESPONSE-CENTERED TALK LIKE?

The discussion between Ms. Antos and some of her first grade students is an example of response-centered talk. At first this discussion does not seem very productive. Children recall the literal facts mostly presented through the illustrations of the story (see the conversation presented at the beginning of the chapter). They describe the fox getting stung, falling in the haystack, and having flour fall on his head. This conversation does, however, differ from a typical recitation. The teacher does not ask questions in order to initiate topics for discussion (although she does introduce a topic for discussion by wondering why the fox never gets the hen), nor does she evaluate the correctness of children's responses. Rather, the teacher begins with an open-ended invitation for comments and contributes her own comments, which reveal her opinions ("I liked that the hen kept getting away, too"). She also invites several quiet children into the discussion. The tone of the talk in this example is more like a good dinner conversation than a discussion in which the teacher conducts a "gentle inquisition" (Atwell, 1987; Eeds & Wells, 1989).

An important hallmark of response-centered talk is that children set the agenda for discussion; their comments initiate topics of discussion. Children's comments arise from their unique and personal responses to books—hence the name response-centered talk. Rather than beginning by having children recall the main characters and sequence of events in the story (as is typical of many recitation lessons about stories), response-centered talk wanders around the story guided by children's attention to personally relevant events and reactions.

In the conversation presented at the beginning of the chapter children recalled several events from the story ("I like when he gets stinged. He's running. All those bees get out."). However, the teacher makes no attempt to have children recall the exact order of events from the story and the tone of the conversation suggests that both the teacher and students assume that everyone understood the order of events. They seem to be sharing their common enjoyment of the antics of the fox. This illustrates a second hallmark of response-centered talk—the building of a shared, common understanding of a book.

HOW DO TEACHERS INVOLVE STUDENTS IN RESPONSE-CENTERED TALK?

There are four important aspects to consider when attempting discussions that feature response-centered talk.

- Response-centered talk begins with teachers' careful planning.
- Response-centered talk is carried out in thoughtful interaction with children; therefore, the manner in which talk is guided is also important.
- Response-centered talk is extended by children's selection of personal response activities.
- Response centered talk involves assessing children's responses to literature.

PLANNING FOR RESPONSE-CENTERED TALK

Good conversations about books begin with books that are worthy of deep thinking. They have multiple layers of meaning, have many gaps for readers to fill, and appeal to teachers as well as to children. *Rosie's Walk* is a good example of a book that has these characteristics. On the surface it is a story about a hen and a fox who tries to capture her. Yet, below the surface readers must decide for themselves whether the hen is merely lucky due to the fox's ineptitude or whether the hen is really cunning and actually enjoys daily walks that taunt the fox. Because the issue is not resolved in the book, teachers and children can participate equally in a discussion about the merits of one interpretation or the other.

Another book that I find has plenty of talk potential is *Hey, Al* (Yorinks, 1986). In this story Al, a janitor, and his dog, Eddie, are invited to a lush tropical island by a strange bird who appears one day. On the island Al and Eddie lead a worry-free life until they begin to turn into birds. They use their newly formed wings to escape from the island; however, while flying, Eddie seems to fall into the ocean and drown. Later he safely returns home. First graders with whom I have shared this story have speculated on how the island got into the sky, why the bird wanted to take Al and Eddie to the island, how Al and Eddie turned into birds and back to people again, and who all the birds are on the island. At a deeper level students have explored possible themes such as the best things of life are found at home and it is better not to wish for more than you have.

Selecting a good book goes hand in hand with a careful reading, which suggests possible interpretations. In other words, a good book for response-centered talk offers opportunities for interpretive work. As teachers read books with this potential, they begin making their own tentative interpretations. The purpose of this work is not to identify the one right interpretation of a literary work. Rather it is to inform the teacher about possible directions for interpretations that they might provide during conversations about the book.

Teachers read the book carefully, thinking about their own responses and the possible significance of those responses. This leads to forming tentative interpretations of the book. For example, as I first read *The Pain and the Great One* (Blume, 1974), I was amused by the two main characters' childishly egocentric points of view. The author emphasizes the importance of point of view by allowing the characters to participate in the same activities and even say the same words, but mean two different things. I realized that I took a different perspective than the class, one that allowed me to be amused by the children. Thus, I began to formulate a tentative interpretation in which neither point of view of the children provides the whole picture. Of course, children may or may not discover my interpretation, but it provides me with a space in which to work if the class does not come up with responses that lead them into interpretive work.

One technique that is particularly useful in encouraging interpretive work is to prepare one interpretive question that may or may not be used during a response-centered talk. Interpretive questions are questions that focus attention on one or more of my interpretations. Ms. Antos's question about *Rosie's Walk* ("Do you think that Rosie knew that the fox was behind her?") is a good example of an interpretive question. It draws children's attention to making inferences about the knowledge and intentions of the two characters. An interpretive question that I frequently use when I discuss *Hey, Al* is "What did Al learn by being on the island?" This question focuses attention on the important outcomes from Al's stay at the island. I have found that "Who do the parents love best?" to be a fruitful interpretive question for *The Pain and the Great One* because it leads to talk about point of view.

> ***"The most productive talk in the primary grades usually is in response to a book read aloud and occurs in small groups."***

Finally, teachers need to establish rules and routines for response-centered talk. The most productive talk in the primary grades usually is in response to a book read aloud (picture books that have talk potential are often too difficult for many first and second grade readers) and occurs in small groups. However, most teachers read aloud books to the whole class and find it difficult to fit small group conversations into their crowded daily schedules. One solution is to read books aloud to the whole group and have a response-centered talk about the book with only one small group daily, so that over the period of a week all of the children have an opportunity to participate in the activity. The composition of the groups could change on a weekly basis, so that over a year children have numerous opportunities to participate in conversations with everyone in the class. I have found that mixing children with different language and cognitive abilities supports rich conversations. For several of the children in Ms. Antos's group English was their second language. Yet, they were able and willing to join in the conversation knowing that Ms. Antos would focus on the content of their contributions rather than the form of their English.

Simple rules make the conversations flow smoothly, such as expecting each child to make at least one contribution and no child to dominate the discussion. Many teachers discuss rules with the whole class before beginning small response group sessions (see Wiencek, this volume, for an extended discussion of this).

GUIDING RESPONSE-CENTERED TALK

A good response-centered conversation results from children's willing participation and a teacher's skillful weaving of child-centeredness and teacher guidance. Children must be willing to talk about what they were thinking about as they listened to (or read) a story. They must know that their responses will be accepted without ridicule or censure.

> *“Teachers need to stand back to let children talk to one another and learn to manage turn-taking on their own.”*

Teachers must be willing to accept the kinds of responses that are typically found in an open-ended conversation. Ms. Antos was willing to let all of the children share something about their favorite part of the story even when those responses seemed disjointed, somewhat inarticulate, and often repetitive.

This role of standing back and being silent is sometimes the most difficult part of learning to guide response-centered talk. Teachers often report they have to bite their tongues to keep from replying after each child speaks, even if it is just to say, “Yes, um um,” or to repeat the child's answer (usually presenting it in standard dialect). Yet, teachers need to stand back to let children talk to one another and learn to manage turn-taking on their own. Ms. Antos's children were beginning to learn to manage their own child-centered conversations. They successfully talked about topics of interest and sometimes took turns without Ms. Antos's intervention.

However, there are times when teachers should step into the conversation to provide guidance. Helping shy children to respond is one such time, and encouraging children to explain or expand on their responses is another. Ms. Antos ensured that several children got a turn in the conversation when she felt they were being left out. She also sometimes simply asked, “Why?” when she sensed that children might have more to say or could make their thinking more explicit.

Two more substantive reasons for teachers to step into a conversation are to make explicit children's thinking and to raise the level of talk. The real purpose of response-centered talk is to use children's responses or ideas as a springboard to reasoning and problem solving that results in new discoveries or understandings. As they present arguments, children often leave implicit the facts that are important to support their positions. Or, children may struggle to put into words what they are thinking, so that it is difficult for the other children to follow their line of reasoning. In these instances teachers intervene to restate children's arguments by making important ideas explicit or restating positions more coherently. When Israel argued that “She takes different places on her walk,” Ms. Antos restated in more explicit terms that the hen was intentionally leading the fox to places where he could potentially get into trouble. She said, “So you think she does that on purpose?”

Another time that teachers step into conversations to provide guidance is when conversations seem to get bogged down on the level of “The part I like best was.” In these instances teachers may interject with an interpretive question. Ms. Antos waited until each of the children had at least one opportunity for talking about events and ideas of personal interest before asking the interpretive question. Other teachers report they sometimes do not need to use a question. Many times children pose their own questions or make statements which lead into exploring alternative interpretations.

EXTENDING BEYOND RESPONSE-CENTERED TALK

The mark of a good book talk is that afterward children are eager to read the story for themselves or spontaneously talk about the book as they engage in other activities. Teachers may want to capitalize on this interest by providing further opportunities to explore the book. Sometimes children want to participate in additional talks about the story. Second and third discussions about the same book often result in particularly rich book talks (Short, 1993). After a first talk, children could brainstorm ideas they would like to talk about in a second conversation. Older children could write their ideas in clusters, or teachers could prepare a list (teachers should also contribute their ideas for further discussion). Children can also be encouraged to select response activities of interest. They may want to act out stories, retell stories to other classmates, or listen to a tape recording of the story. Figure 1 presents a page from a first grader's response journal. In his small group talk about *Rosie's Walk*, he and his classmates argued whether the fox sabotaged himself or whether Rosie sabotaged the fox. His response reflects his interpretation of that talk.

EVALUATING RESPONSE-CENTERED TALK

Response-centered talk provides a window on children's thinking about literature as well as teachers' craft of supporting and extending that thinking. Tape-recording and transcribing book conversations provides data for accomplishing both tasks. Given teachers' busy schedules, tape-recording only an occasional talk is beneficial, and the time required by transcribing the recording is rewarded by the insights the data provides on individual children's responses to literature and teachers' success in stepping in and out of conversations.

The conversation among Ms. Antos and her students is an example of a book talk transcription rich in information about both the teacher and her students. Ten children participated in the conversation for a total of 45 turns. An example is Israel's contributions to the conversation. His contributions to the conversation begin with a summary of the story's events, implying that he not only recalls the individual events in the story but also generalizes beyond them:

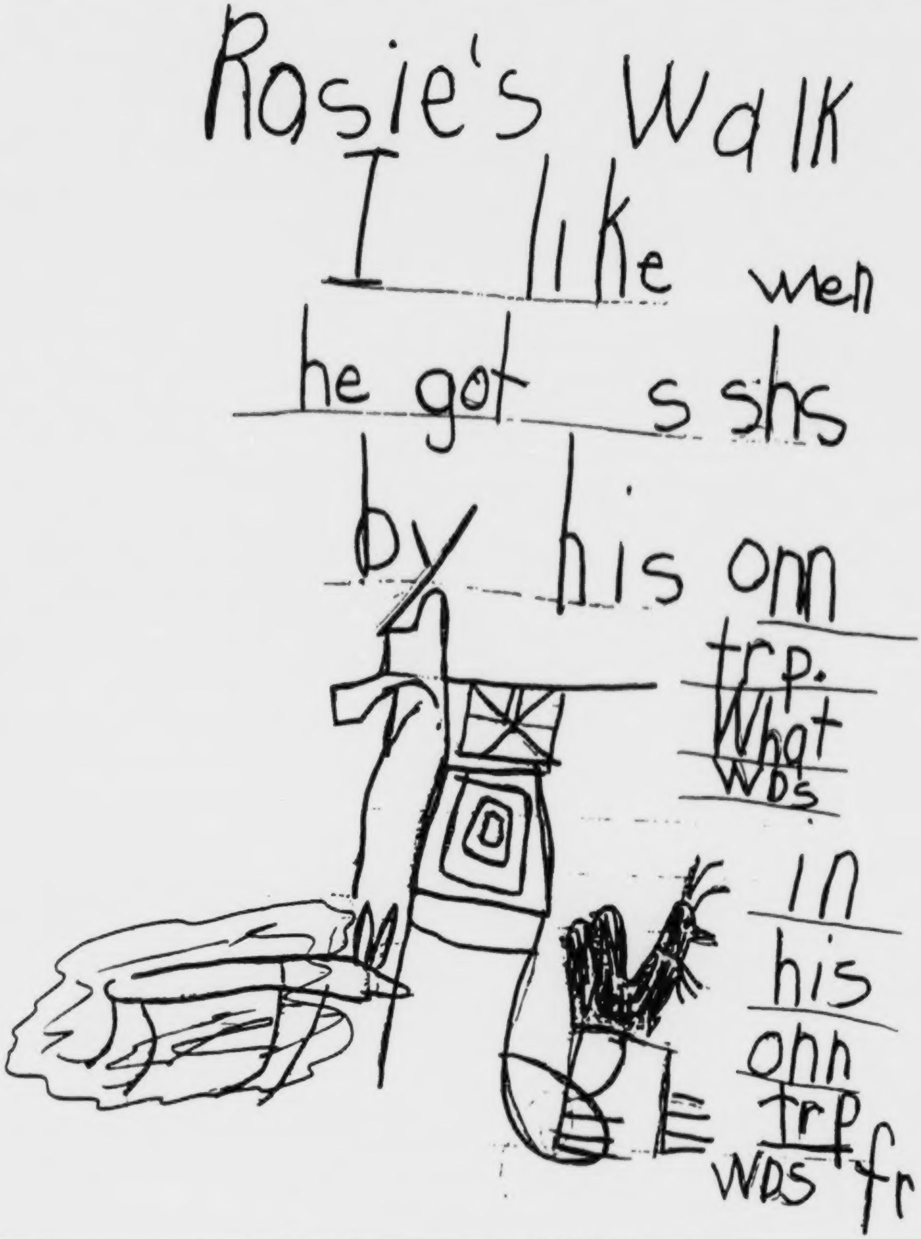
> "I like the part when the fox he keeps on trying to get the hen but he doesn't."
> "Because she, she comes over and the fox can't."

Later, Israel also infers a cause for the story's course of events (that the hen can get over the obstacles but the fox cannot). He interprets the story by reasoning that the hen intentionally leads the fox through the obstacles and that she knows he is behind her. In

Figure 1

Rosie's Walk

I like when he got sabotaged by his own trap. What was in his own trap was (the) fox.



Rosie's Walk
I like wen
he got s shs
by his onn
trp.
What
wDs
in
his
onn
trp
WDS fr

the following excerpt Israel makes one incorrect statement (or at least uses an inaccurate description) that the fox is sick (the illustrations infer the fox was hurt rather than sick), but clearly identifies the fox as a villain who gets his just reward:

> "I like it when he gets sick because he's a fox. I think I know why the hen, the hen thinks the fox is not in back of her."
> "Because the fox tries to catch the hen and she takes different places on her walk."
> "Yeah (she does that on purpose)"

Israel's responses show a high level of engagement with the story, a beyond-the-literal understanding, and an ability to draw on general knowledge to use as evidence for reasoning. He also follows the line of conversation, answering the teacher's implied question ("I wonder why he never got the hen") and contributing responses that acknowledge and extend other students' responses.

We can also examine Ms. Antos's contributions to the conversation. She is a preservice teacher who was practicing response-centered talk as a part of a prepracticum experience. She assesses her own craft:

> It's funny seeing the transcript of the conversation and comparing it to my memory. At the time it seemed as if the children weren't saying much that was very important and I was very worried about discipline. Some children wouldn't talk and others kept jumping in when I wanted to really emphasize a point. I felt like the conversation was a big ball rolling down the hill and all I could do was to ride along.

Ms. Antos's initial reaction to hearing herself on tape is similar to those of other teachers who are trying a new strategy for the first time. They find it hard to concentrate on what children are saying and at the same time orchestrate the conversation. However, Ms. Antos found much that she liked in the transcript:

> I thought I did a lot more talking than I actually did. I was happy to see that I talked less than half of the turns in the conversation. I really didn't initiate new topics except once by my comment about why the fox didn't catch the hen and by asking the interpretative question. I did get some children to expand on their answers.

However, Ms. Antos also noticed some things she would like to improve:

> I need to work on slowing down and really paying attention to what the children mean. There were a couple of places where the children had really good ideas, but which, at the time, I didn't really catch. For example, when Shamir first introduced the idea that Rosie was actually leading the fox around, I didn't get what she was saying. I could have asked her to clarify her answer a bit. But Israel picked up on it later. But the worst was at the end of the conversation when Benjamin suggested Rosie took quick peeks, and Tiffany thought Rosie should have been able to hear what was happening to the fox. Those were

> really good ideas that just got lost in my rush to end the conversation and get on to the response journals. I could have summarized those points better and then got back to the other children who thought Rosie didn't know.

Like most preservice teachers, Ms. Antos needs time to develop the skill of hearing what children are saying about literature. As she becomes more knowledgeable about literature and more experienced guiding response-centered talk, Ms. Antos will naturally pause to emphasize insightful points made by children and to interject more of her own voice. In this conversation Ms. Antos was anxious that all the children had an opportunity to speak and that she did not direct the conversation. She succeeded quite well in achieving these goals. However, there are times when teachers can and ought to contribute their own responses to response-centered conversations. For example, none of the children referred to experiences in their lives or in other stories that related to *Rosie's Walk*. Ms. Antos might have mentioned the *Roadrunner* cartoon or related an experience when she was frightened by someone following her. She might have shared a personal thought that she had while reading. For example, she might have shared that she knew that the fox would never get the hen even before the story ended or that she expected the hen would lead the fox into a trap where the farmer would get him.

CONCLUSION

Response-centered talk consists of a combination of children's responses and thinking and a teacher's responses and guidance. It moves from random and tentative sharing of salient events from a story to exploring a story's deeper meanings. The resulting literary interpretations arise from children's reasoning and problem solving. Through response-centered conversations, children build shared, enriched interpretations of literary works and practice new strategies for thinking about literature.

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CHAPTER 14

Planning, Initiating, and Sustaining Literature Discussion Groups: The Teacher's Role

B. Joyce Wiencek

Education is rapidly changing and educators are constantly being encouraged to engage students in new literacy activities. The time has come when teachers are choosing to enhance their reading program by adding weekly literature discussion groups as a new component, and they find themselves seeking assistance on how to implement these new activities. Teachers have been hearing a lot about literature discussion groups at conferences and in journals, but there are many questions that must be answered before teachers will feel comfortable starting and using discussion groups. They wonder about how to plan for these groups, how to start the first discussion groups with students, how to sustain discussion groups over time, how to ensure continued growth by students, and the role teachers play in this process.

This chapter will provide teachers with a model for literature discussion groups, the Conversational Discussion Group (CDG) (O'Flahavan, 1989; O'Flahavan, Stein, Wiencek, & Marks, 1992), and a process for developing literature discussion groups in the classroom. Before exploring the model and the process, it is important to think about the dynamics of talk in the classroom and what characterizes discussion. As noted previously in Almasi (this volume), during the last 20 years researchers have examined the patterns of talk in classrooms and found that teachers often use I-R-E recitation patterns (Cazden, 1988; Dillon, 1984; Mehan, 1979). Teacher talk dominates the recitation pattern. In the recitation pattern teachers assume a centralized role as the leader and orchestrator of interaction, deciding who may speak to whom, when, and about which topic (Cazden, 1988). Recently, some teachers have become interested in developing decentralized patterns of interaction within their classroom communities. Decentralized patterns of interaction (Gall & Gall, 1976) facilitate more free-flowing exchanges of ideas between participants and do not require a leader (such as the teacher) to orchestrate the interaction. Think of a game of dodge ball.

The ball bounces freely fromone participant to another, and it is difficult to anticipate to whom the ball will bounce next. In decentralized conversations, talk flows freely as participants jump in and out of the conversation, building on the ideas of others or introducing new ideas.

Discussion "engages people in public talk" (Bridges, 1979, p. 27). The purpose of discussion is to enable a group of people to explore a topic about which the group wishes to become more knowledgeable, to understand, and to evaluate. Rules govern the group's interactions during a discussion (Bridges, 1979). Literature discussion groups provide students with the opportunity to examine topics that interest them. As a result, these students are more likely to question, to clarify, and to consider alternate points of view in the stories they have read. Literature discussion groups using decentralized discussion patterns have been shared recently in professional journals. These include grand conversations (Eeds & Wells, 1989), book clubs (Raphael et al., 1992), and conversational discussion groups (O'Flahavan, 1989; O'Flahavan, Stein, Wiencek, & Marks, 1992). These frameworks are useful to teachers, but often do not provide the practical information teachers need to assist them as they implement literature discussion groups in their classrooms. One framework, the Conversational Discussion Group, will be explored.

> ***"Decentralized patterns of interaction facilitate more free-flowing exchanges of ideas between participants and do not require a leader to orchestrate the interaction."***

THE CONVERSATIONAL DISCUSSION GROUP FRAMEWORK

The Conversational Discussion Group (CDG) framework enables teachers to simultaneously facilitate the development of students' social and interpretive abilities during discussion. It is a model that enables the teacher to assume a socioculturalist stance towards teaching and learning (Rogoff, 1990; Vygotsky, 1978) by allowing students to actively construct their interactive and interpretive abilities in the context of the discussion as they work with their peers and teacher. Interactive abilities are those strategies or rules that a group develops to govern the flow of talk, such as only one person speaking at a time (O'Flahavan, 1989; O'Flahavan et al., 1992). Interpretive abilities are those strategies participants use to discuss a piece of literature, such as talking about character actions and setting. Prior to participating in a CDG, students read a story and write a response in their literature journal. Teachers often choose to have students read and respond to the story the day before the discussion. This gives students time to reflect on their reading.

> ***"As a member of the group, the teacher tries to limit his or her talk during the discussion and assumes the roles of observer and scaffolder during the discussion. The teacher may contribute to the group when students need assistance or support as they explore a topic."***

The CDG has three phases: the introduction/review, the discussion, and the debriefing (O'Flahavan, 1989; O'Flahavan et al., 1992; Wiencek & O'Flahavan, 1994). During the introduction/review phase the teacher meets with a group of students for about 5 minutes and assists them in the development of strategies for interaction and interpretation that are recorded on a group chart (explained more fully later in "initiating literature discussion groups"). Then the teacher either leaves the group to allow students to conduct their own peer discussion group or participates in the group. As a member of the group, the teacher tries to limit his or her talk during the discussion and assumes the roles of observer and scaffolder during the discussion. The teacher may contribute to the group when students need assistance or support as they explore a topic. For example, during a discussion when students are exploring the author's writing style, one student raises a new topic, yet the group continues to explore the author's writing style. After students complete their exploration of the author's writing, the teacher reminds them of the topic that was introduced but not discussed. The teacher is thus facilitating students' opportunity to explore an interesting topic that might not have been discussed.

Teachers could also choose to assume a coparticipant role in this model where they function as a member of equal status in the group. Discussion is free-flowing and is decentralized and leaderless. Following the 20-minute discussion, the teacher again assumes the role of leader and invites students to review the chart and briefly explain those strategies they utilized for interpretation and interaction during discussion and how they used them. During the debriefing phase the group may add new strategies to the chart. The teacher may introduce new interaction strategies appropriate to the group or new interpretive strategies that facilitate students' understanding of a piece of text. Debriefings usually last about 5 to 7 minutes.

A CDG typically lasts for about 30 minutes, the same amount of time allotted for a reading group in many classrooms. The CDG enables students to develop interactive abilities and interpretive abilities simultaneously. Another feature of the CDG is that it enables the teacher to coach a group of students before and after a discussion and enables students to have discussions without the teacher present. Teachers may assume a variety of roles in a CDG.

PLANNING FOR LITERATURE DISCUSSION GROUPS

Teachers must consider many issues before initiating literature discussion groups. These issues may be revised at any time throughout the process. Issues to consider include the goals of the discussion, literature selection, group formation, schedule, physical context, and the teacher's role. By considering these issues before initiating groups, teachers are able to more fully focus their attention as they initiate and sustain the groups during discussion.

GOALS

Goals are broad statements about how students in a classroom will benefit from participating in literature discussion groups. By generating a list of goals teachers can define what they believe to be developmentally appropriate for the age/grade of students they work with and can consider students' prior knowledge and experience with discussion. In Figure 1, examples of goals are listed that are developmentally appropriate for first and fifth grade students. By first identifying the goals, teachers are able to convey to their colleagues, principal, parents, and students why literature discussion groups are an important and integral part of their literacy program.

In time, as the expertise of the teacher and students participating in literature discussion groups increases, the goals will change accordingly. Eventually, students may even

Figure 1
Developmentally appropriate goals for literature discussion.

First grade goals

I want my students to:
- respond to a story by drawing a picture and writing a sentence about the picture.
- share their response in the group.
- talk about the things they liked in the story and the things they disliked.
- learn literary terms such as character, setting, and problem.

Fifth grade goals

I want my students to:
- participate actively in free-flowing discussions where they are participants of equal status.
- expand their repertoire of strategies for interpreting literature and utilize them during discussion when appropriate.
- respect the thoughts and interpretations of their peers and teacher.
- develop social abilities which enable them to fully participate.
- become active readers who are thoughtful and reflective about what they read.

negotiate the goals of literature discussion groups with their teacher. For example, students might suggest to the teacher that they would like to read and discuss tall tales or chapter books, rather than short stories or the genre currently being explored. They might even negotiate for literature discussion groups where no teacher is present.

LITERATURE RESOURCES

Availability of literature is often the factor that determines the type of literature to which students are exposed, but genre and quality should also assume an important role in the planning process. Take time to evaluate the literature that is available. Many teachers generate a list of available literature resources that might include the basal reading texts adopted by the school, a literature anthology series, text sets of trade books, and books in the media center. As the list is generated, books are classified according to genre, and the type of text students might read first is considered. The genres available might include picture books, short stories, chapter books, fairy tales, fables, nonfiction, historical fiction, and biography (Bromley, 1991).

Initially, consider choosing a genre with which the teacher and students are familiar. One suggestion is to begin with short stories, because of the many prior experiences teachers and students have had with them, and because they are readily available. In most cases, students and teachers have had opportunities to read, experience, tell, and connect with short stories in their lives. These past experiences represent a wealth of prior knowledge that participants may draw from and build upon as they read and interpret text during a literature discussion. These experiences also increase the likelihood that participants will have positive experiences with their initial literature discussions. Additionally, teachers are familiar with many of the literary conventions of fictional text, such as characters, setting, and plot.

As the level of sophistication of your students increases, so may the challenges they choose to undertake. Nonfiction is a genre students may find more difficult to discuss, but in time they might be able to read and discuss two or more pieces of literature—such as a fiction piece and a nonfiction piece—about the same topic. Their discussion might relate to how the two pieces complement or contradict each other (see Guthrie & McCann; Hartman & Allison; and Leal, this volume, for more extensive information regarding discussions involving nonfiction texts and multiple texts).

After students become confident and comfortable with literature discussion groups using short stories, introduce a new genre for students to read and discuss such as fairy tales, nonfiction, or biography (Bromley, 1991). The genre of literature will influence the interpretation strategies students use during a discussion. For example, students might consider the historical context or time frame of the biography *And Then What Happened, Paul Revere?* as an enhancement to the discussion (Fritz, 1973).

Choose literature that is of high quality and that will engage students in discussion. After the first year, invite students to evaluate the literature you selected and allow them to rate it on a scale of one to three, with three meaning an excellent choice students would highly recommend to their peers, two meaning an acceptable choice that they would sometimes recommend, and one meaning a book they would not recommend. Ask students to suggest stories they think would be appropriate for discussion.

Many teachers find the resources are limited in their school so they must use stories from a basal reader. Select the best stories for discussion, those stories that you and your students have found engaging or highly interesting. The quality of the literature will affect the discussion that occurs. Books that have won the U.S. Newbery and Caldecott awards are readily available in many schools and the media specialist may have a list of titles. Teachers interested in integrating the use of quality literature with content area subjects often utilize resource books such as *Children's Literature and Social Studies: Selecting and Using Notable Books*. Resources such as the "Children's Books" section of *The Reading Teacher*, the "Bookalogues" section of *Language Arts*, and journals such as *The New Advocate*, *Booklinks*, and *The Horn Book* contain valuable reviews and articles.

GROUPS

An important phase of planning for literature discussion groups is the process of forming discussion groups. Each group should consist of four to eight participants with five to six per group being optimal (O'Flahavan et al., 1992). In groups of less than four students, there may be too few ideas and perspectives to ensure a rich discussion. In groups of more than eight students, each student has limited opportunities to share his or her thoughts and perspectives.

Consider the social, interpretive, and reading abilities of your students as you form groups (Wiencek & O'Flahavan, 1994). Create a chart on which you rate the social, interpretive, and reading abilities of each student using a scale of one to three. In Figure 2 group formation criteria are clarified. Each student receives a score based on the criteria.

The teacher utilizes these scores to place students in groups reflective of each student's social, interpretive, and reading abilities (see Figure 3). It is best to begin with social abilities, since the ability of students to work together will increase the likelihood of success. Also, be sure to review the interpretive and reading ability scores of students to ensure diversity of each ability in all groups. Then, review the membership of each group again, and make any final adjustments.

Groups should work together initially for a time period of approximately 6 to 8 weeks (Wiencek & O'Flahavan, 1994), so that they have the opportunity to become comfortable and confident and to cohere as a group in the discussion context. A group needs time to develop social rules that govern its interactions, and participants need time to develop awareness and shared responsibility.

Figure 2
Group formation criteria.

Social

1 = Student who is very quiet in group discussions.
2 = Student who willingly shares his or her ideas in group discussions most of the time.
3 = Student who willingly participates in group discussions and often assumes the role of leader.

Interpretive

1 = Student has considerable difficulty comprehending text independently and is unable to share the basic story ideas with peers.
2 = Student usually is able to comprehend most text independently and shares understanding with peers.
3 = Student comprehends text independently, using prior knowledge and textual clues to create meaning, and is able to justify the meanings he or she has created.

Reading ability

1 = Student who is unable to read/decode text independently.
2 = Student who is able to read/decode most text.
3 = Student who is able to read/decode a variety of texts independently.

From J. Wiencek and J.F. O'Flahavan, "From Teacher-Led to Peer Discussions about Literature: Suggestions for Making the Shift" in *Language Arts*, *71*(7), 488–498. Copyright 1994 by the National Council of Teachers of English. Reprinted with permission.

SCHEDULE AND PHYSICAL SETTING

The scheduling and the physical setting for literature discussion groups must also be considered. In a typical classroom there are 25 to 30 students, which means there will be four or five groups of six to seven students per group. The teacher and students need time to adjust to their new roles and responsibilities and time to develop new strategies that allow them to fully participate in literature discussion groups. To facilitate this transition, I have found it helpful for teachers to meet with only one group per day as they initiate literature discussions (Wiencek & O'Flahavan, 1994). This allows the teacher to focus on the social and interpretive abilities of one group of students each day and provides time for the teacher to reflect on one group's functions before meeting with the next group. This time for reflection is important because it enables the teacher to think: "What went well in today's group?" "What didn't go so well?" and "What would I do differently next time?" The teacher is able to actively build his or her schema each day and utilize knowledge developed today to help tomorrow's group.

For many teachers, the initial group meetings are the most demanding since this is often a new experience for teachers and students. Teachers have to learn from their experiences as they rapidly build new schema. I frequently remind teachers that they have

Figure 3
Sample student grouping.

A group of students who represent a range of social, interpretive, and reading abilities:

	Social	Interpretive	Reading Ability
Laurie	3	3	3
Alphonso	2	1	1
Li	3	1	2
Juan	1	2	3
Rosita	2	2	2

had many first experiences such as their first reading groups or the first days of writing workshop, and that everyone, both teacher and students, survived the experience and learned from it. Beginning with only one group each day, the teacher is provided with time to develop schema, time to reflect on the experience, and time to gradually increase his or her competence and confidence. After the initial few weeks, teachers often begin to meet with two groups of students on any day. In time, some teachers even schedule and facilitate three or four groups to meet on any given day, depending on the role the teacher assumes in the group.

Teachers are often concerned about what the other students will do while the teacher meets with and observes a literature discussion group. These activities should be similar to those that are assigned while a teacher meets with a reading group (Wiencek & O'Flahavan, 1994). Students can pursue activities that they work on independently with one or two peers. For example, students might read and respond in their journals, or they might work on a piece of writing and confer with peers.

Besides scheduling, teachers need to consider the physical environment where literature discussion groups will meet. Group participants should be seated at the same level, thus affording participants equal status (Cazden, 1988). Some groups prefer to sit in a circle on the floor and others prefer to sit at a table. Participants should be able to make eye contact with one another so they can indicate attentiveness by looking at the speaker (Cazden, 1988; Gall & Gall, 1976).

THE TEACHER'S ROLE

The most important issue a teacher must resolve before initiating literature discussion groups is the role he or she will assume in the group. Teachers may assume a variety of roles in the discussion, and these roles may correspond with the needs of their

“Teachers need to remember that a literature discussion group is a time for a free exchange of ideas between participants and an opportunity for students to talk about topics of interest to them.”

students. Some teachers choose a role that allows them to fully participate in the group as a coparticipant throughout the discussion, but others assume a role where they participate only in coaching students before and after the discussion (O’Flahavan & Stein, 1992). When making this decision, teachers need to consider the age and grade level of students, their personal ability to relinquish control, and the amount the teacher will talk. With younger students in first and second grades, teachers often choose to fully participate throughout the discussion. This method enables them to scaffold and support the developing abilities of young students to sustain a discussion and allows the teacher to model behaviors and strategies that students may adopt (see Cairney, this volume, for an extended discussion of scaffolding). With older students, the choice becomes more complex because students are often able to sustain a discussion without the teacher present. Some teachers choose to participate in the groups initially and after a few sessions leave the group for a short period of time, eventually allowing a group to function on its own. When teachers choose to participate throughout the discussion, I suggest they audiotape or videotape the discussion and review the tape later that same day (Wiencek & O’Flahavan, 1994). When reviewing tapes, teachers often discover that they talk too much and initiate topics that they feel are important to a story rather than allowing students to explore topics they initiate. Teachers need to remember that a literature discussion group is a time for a free exchange of ideas between participants and an opportunity for students to talk about topics of interest to them.

No matter which role a teacher chooses to assume—coparticipant, coach from the sidelines, or coparticipant who gradually releases increasing responsibility and eventually leaves the group—the teacher must be sure to continue coaching every group of students regularly. This ensures that students continue to learn and develop new strategies. As students become increasingly confident and comfortable, the teacher may choose to change his or her role in a discussion. During the introduction of a new literary genre for discussion, the teacher could assume a more active role during initial discussions and gradually release responsibility to students as they become more confident and capable. With older ESL students, the teacher may assume the role of coparticipant, model, and discussion clarifier. Each teacher is the expert on the strengths and needs of his or her students, so each teacher must choose the role that will enable the students to grow and reap the benefits of discussion.

INITIATING LITERATURE DISCUSSION GROUPS

The community of students in a classroom is usually excited and anxious to participate in literature discussion groups, so capitalize on their interest and motivation the first week by having everyone participate during every literature discussion. Select a different story for each group for the first week, and let all students individually read and respond to each story the day before its discussion.

Provide students with a variety of options to choose from as they read a story. They might read it independently, with a friend or more capable reader, or they might listen to and read along with a tape recording. Focus on providing every reader access to the literature so all can participate in the discussion.

Each student's written response to the story in his or her journal provides an opportunity for the student to write and think about what was read. I suggest that teachers allow students to respond in any way that they find meaningful. Younger students may draw or draw and write, and older students may draw, map, retell, question, list, or explore important ideas. After students have responded in their journals, they may share with their peers the many ways they chose to respond.

One literature discussion group should meet each day and act as a model for the other groups using the fishbowl technique (Arends, 1994). This technique allows the group discussing the story to meet together in their group setting while the other students are seated outside and around the group participating in discussion. For the first discussion, the teacher selects a group he or she believes would be a good model for other groups. Students participating in the literature discussion bring their copy of the story and journal response with them. The students seated in the outer circle of the fishbowl serve as observers, not participants. After the discussion, student observers are given an opportunity to share their observations.

Using the CDG format, the teacher begins the introduction/review phase of the discussion by asking students to share briefly their definition of discussion. Then, the teacher introduces the chart where the interaction and interpretation strategies for each group will be recorded (see Figure 4). A brief discussion occurs about the meaning of the term "interaction" and the strategies a group develops and utilizes to effectively work together.

Next, the teacher invites students to suggest some interaction strategies that might help their group during the discussion and records them on the chart. Then, the teacher invites students to share interpretation strategies that are used for talking about a story or piece of text. The teacher records the interpretive strategies students generate on the chart in the appropriate column. The chart acts as a resource for the group during their discussion and cues them to ways they could talk about or interpret a story or ways group participants need to interact during a discussion. Then the teacher invites students to begin their discussion.

Figure 4
Example of the charts used to document interactive and interpretive development.

Group ____________________

Interaction

Pay attention

Look at the person who is talking

Don't interrupt

Give every person a chance to talk

Interpretation

Characters

Setting

Illustrations

Relate to personal experiences

Point of view

Author's craft

Compare to movie or different version

* Some teachers use a different color marker each week to record the interaction and interpretation strategies to ensure new strategies are added each week.

The teacher either joins the group as a coparticipant or leaves the group and sits nearby to observe and listen to the discussion. While listening or participating in the discussion, the teacher writes a few notes on a smaller version of the interaction and interpretation chart in front of him or her (see Figure 5). The teacher uses this chart as a tool to record phrases used by students, other interpretation strategies used by students, or problems the group encounters during the discussion.

After about 20 minutes of discussion, the teacher re-enters the group in the role of teacher and asks students about their discussion. During this phase of the CDG, the teacher leads the participants in a group debriefing of both the interpretive and interactive strategies used during the discussion (see McGee, this volume). First, the group revisits the list of interpretive strategies recorded on the chart and shares the strategies they used and how they used them. For example, a student might say, "I talked about the character when I talked about Peter and how he made angels in the snow." After revisiting the interpretive strategies listed on the chart, the teacher asks students to share other interpretive strategies that may have arisen during the discussion. For example, one student remembers that he related the character's actions to his own personal experiences in life, so the new strategy "share personal experiences related to the story" is added to the chart. At this time, the teacher may also share strategies he or she noted students used during the story, help them label the strategy, or introduce a new strategy that helped them understand the story. The teacher assumes the role of coach during the debriefing by making students aware of how they talked about the story.

Figure 5
Example of the notes the teacher makes during discussion.

Group ______________________ Date ____________

Interaction	*Interpretation*
• 2 students talking at one time	Li shares personal experience with his dog which relates to story.
Students looking at each other	• Laurie disliked ending of story, suggests a different one.
Alphonso hasn't spoken.	Talk about picture
• Rosie said, "And what do you think, Alphonso?"	• Juan—character's feelings

• Indicates new strategies that emerged in the context of the discussion, which the students and teacher will revisit during the debriefing phase of the discussion.

The teacher then leads the students through a review of the interaction strategies they used and again invites students to share other strategies they may need to add to their list. For example, a student might suggest the strategy "Look at the person who is talking" after observing, during the group's interactions, that some students did not listen carefully, or "Encourage everyone to participate" after observing that one student never spoke during the discussion. Students are encouraged to speak constructively about problems that arose in the context of the discussion and to suggest strategies to solve the problem. Interaction strategies enable students as members of a group to become increasingly capable of self-regulating their behaviors (O'Flahavan, et al., 1992).

The teacher then invites the other student observers, seated in the outer fishbowl, to share their positive observations and questions. During the course of the first week, each group has an opportunity to model for the other students, to generate their own interaction and interpretation chart, and to participate in their first discussion.

After the first week, groups meet regularly on their assigned day and the introduction/review, discussion, and debriefing phases occur during each literature discussion group.

SUSTAINING LITERATURE DISCUSSION GROUPS

The primary role of the teacher in sustaining literature discussion groups is to ensure that students continue to learn, develop, and apply interactive and interpretive strategies during each and every discussion. To borrow a quote from Calkins, "Don't be afraid to teach" (1986, p. 163). During the debriefing time the teacher may introduce new strategies that students might use to interpret a story. The teacher may select a story because of a particular literary feature found in the story. The teacher allows students to discuss the story and listens to see if this new literary feature is discussed. Often students will discuss the feature, but lack the literary language to identify it. The teacher then introduces the literary language to the students or shares the new strategy as one he or she used to help understand the story. Characters, setting, flashback, point of view, illustration, and author's notes are some examples of literary language teachers may introduce to their students.

Each week as each group meets, it reviews its chart during the introduction/review as a means of reminding students of the interaction and interpretation strategies they have developed and could utilize during discussion. The teacher emphasizes the role of each group member in monitoring the interaction behaviors of their peers during discussion. Some groups choose to mark on the chart as a reminder to themselves those interaction strategies they need to work on during discussion. After five or six weeks students become competent monitoring one another's interactions. As students focus less attention on how to function as a group, they can focus their attention and energies on constructing, sharing, clarifying, and challenging the ideas of their peers and teacher.

To help sustain interest and motivation in literature discussion groups, teachers and students may do a number of things to continue to enrich and enhance the discussions. Introduce a new genre of literature such as biography or historical fiction and observe how students' interpretation strategies may expand in response to the new genre. Some interpretation strategies may be less relevant to the literature being discussed, so students may become selective about the strategies they use to interpret a story. Share these observations with students and invite them to share other observations they have made.

> ***"Some teachers invite their peers into their classrooms to observe them interacting with a literature discussion group, and then visit their peers' rooms to observe as part of a reciprocal exchange."***

Initiate an author study where students read a number of different books by an author such as Judy Blume. During their discussion, students might focus on commonalities and differences in the books. Reading a biography about the author may further enrich their discussions.

Invite students to form their own groups based upon topics of interest to them. They might choose to explore a topic such as immigration, war, or prejudice (Samway et al., 1991), or they might choose to explore a genre such as fables, legends or science fiction. These topics and genres might coincide with a theme students are exploring in social studies or science and help them build a better understanding of a topic.

A SUPPORTIVE TEACHING COMMUNITY

Build a support system within your school or community. Find a colleague (or several) within your building who is interested in literature discussion groups and undertake this new adventure together. A few minutes each week devoted to sharing the successes and problems you encounter is time well spent. The old saying, "Two heads are better than one" applies as colleagues help to solve problems, and they can applaud your successes as well. Some teachers invite their peers into their classrooms to observe them interacting with a literature discussion group, and then visit their peers' rooms to observe as part of a reciprocal exchange. These exchanges allow teachers an opportunity to observe a model in action, to see their peers as risk-takers, and to assume the role of peer coach. They also foster an atmosphere that values continued growth. Principals may provide substitute teachers to enable this type of peer coaching, or they may volunteer to act as a substitute on occasion. Encourage your principal to provide support by supplying funds for resources such as journals and books written to enable teachers to implement literature discussion groups. Other support would include funds for workshops and release time to visit other teachers engaged in literature discussion groups.

Consider initiating a reading and literature discussion group of teachers in your school. The "Teachers as Readers" project sponsored by the International Reading Association may be helpful and can be contacted through your state reading council (Wiencek & O'Flahavan, 1994). Many libraries and bookstores also offer literature discussion groups that teachers may join. By participating in literature discussion groups with friends, colleagues, or other interested parties, you will build your own interpretive knowledge frame and be able to enrich the experiences students have within your classroom community.

CONCLUSIONS

The possibilities for literature discussions are endless. Teachers need to provide themselves and their students time to develop interactive and interpretive competencies. Confidence will grow as competence evolves. Teachers must communicate the thoughts and actions that they value in literature discussion groups. In time, students will also come to appreciate this opportunity to stretch their minds and explore new ideas.

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CHAPTER 15

Guiding Student-Led Discussion Groups

Susan I. McMahon

> Talking was motivational because we were not just writing; we also got to talk. One of my favorite things about talking is that we get a chance to talk to your friends and get ideas from others. We have a chance to say something really important, we get to tell what the author should do better, and we ask questions about the book. Books were sometimes hard for me to understand, and the teacher or other students helped me to understand the story. So, an advantage about the Book Club was talking with friends. Talking is important because you can say what you feel you want to say. This helps you learn to express your ideas and feelings.

In the above quote, Justin expresses his opinion about why students should have opportunities to lead their own literature discussion groups. Few of us would argue that such conversations can prove to be motivational. Certainly it comes as no surprise that students will enjoy and look forward to occasions in which they can talk with their friends. However, teachers may question the benefit of having students lead their own conversations, assuming students will learn more if the teacher leads the discussion and keeps them on task. Although such reservations are understandable, this chapter constructs an argument for why students can benefit from leading their own conversations with teacher support. The chapter begins with an explanation and examples of how teacher actions can sometimes hamper students' conversations; it then provides explanations of how teachers can provide support for quality student-led, small-group interactions; it ends with sample transcripts of student-led discussions and describes what these interactions reveal about student responses to texts. All classroom examples come from research conducted on student-led discussions in fifth grade classrooms in an urban school district (see McMahon & Raphael, in press; Raphael & McMahon, 1994).

STIFLING STUDENT TALK

As teachers, we are responsible for providing an instructional context that promotes optimal learning; sometimes we presume this means that students cannot assume responsibility for maintaining control over their own education. What we may not understand is that our presence and mode of interacting with students may so greatly influence the content and direction of a conversation that students are prohibited from revealing their own thoughts, expanding their own ideas, and learning from one another. Teachers can hamper student interaction in three ways: (a) deciding when and where to begin a discussion, (b) determining turn-taking, and (c) emphasizing particular curricular goals. These factors restrict students' language use and their thinking related to the texts they are reading. This section of the chapter presents an explanation for why children need opportunities with alternate forms of discourse within classrooms.

ORAL LANGUAGE USE IN THE CLASSROOM

Vygotsky (1978) argued that the more opportunities learners have to use language to construct and communicate meaning, the greater the development of higher order thinking. In accepting this idea we realize that we must provide learners with multiple occasions, both oral and written, to use language to communicate the meanings they construct. Most teachers provide two different contexts in which children use oral language to discuss the texts they are reading and ones they have written: total-class discussions and small-group interactions. Total-class discussions are usually teacher-led and teacher-directed activities where students have a forum in which to discuss issues related to both the curriculum and literature, and the teacher can monitor student responses to identify topics for instruction. Even with the most engaged discussions, only a few students can articulate their ideas because of class size and because there is one predominant interactional pattern found in classroom discussions—teacher Initiation, student Response, and teacher Evaluation, or I-R-E (Cazden, 1988). This I-R-E framework for oral talk is not used because teachers want to dominate, but because of two factors within schools: how teachers and students learn to interact in classrooms, and how teachers manage their multiple responsibilities.

The most prevalent interactional pattern in classrooms occurs when teachers and students both assume that "this is how we talk in school." Participation in any group leads individuals to integrate language and behaviors into an identity kit for being a member of the group (Gee, 1990). This identity kit includes rules about membership and conduct, often requiring the teacher to assume responsibility for directing the content and flow of all interactions using particular curricular goals. Both teachers and students construct roles for these interactions, often implicitly, as they participate in teaching and learning. Teachers learn this when they are students and continue the pattern in their own classrooms. Students learn that their role in discussions is to answer the teacher's questions correctly.

"Small-group discussions should provide contexts for attaining many *objectives, such as adopting other forms of oral language, pursuing areas of interest, and engaging in higher order thinking."*

As teachers we often must manage several curricular issues at one time. We need to provide students with opportunities to demonstrate text comprehension; make connections among the texts, their lives, and the curriculum; attend to other students' comments; and participate in the conversation. One way we control these multiple factors is by setting an efficient format in which to assess students' understanding and, at the same time, provide instruction. A discourse pattern where teachers assume total responsibility for the direction and content of a discussion allows them to oversee many different goals at once. Therefore, this discourse pattern may be reasonable for whole-class discussions. However, adopting this same oral pattern for small-group interactions is problematic because these discussions should provide contexts for attaining *many* objectives, such as adopting other forms of oral language, pursuing areas of interest, and engaging in higher order thinking.

For small group interactions teachers can adopt the goal of giving students greater opportunities to use language in multiple ways. In recitations following an I-R-E pattern, participation is limited to one simple form of language use. Students are only required to answer questions while the teacher listens, connects, expands, and encourages others to speak. In this context, the teacher not only assumes the greatest responsibility for the content and flow of the conversation, but also benefits the most by activating higher order thinking and synthesizing the information. Student participation is too limited because in most verbal encounters outside classrooms, individual involvement is much more complex. In addition to talking, participants in conversations also listen, build on one another's ideas, elaborate their thinking for clarification, and encourage others to express their thinking. If the teacher always assumes responsibility for these aspects of the discussion, children will not build or improve upon their abilities to take part in conversations.

Thus, if whole-class discussions are contexts in which the teacher directs the conversation to achieve his or her curricular aims, then small-group discussions should be contexts in which more learners participate, not only to answer questions, but also to clarify, elaborate, and extend their thinking. Further, small-group interactions should provide students with occasions for encouraging others to express their developing thoughts. With a smaller number of participants, more children should be able to talk. However, even though the goal for small-group discussions should be to provide a different context for discussion, teachers frequently structure them in exactly the same way as total-class discussions.

TEACHER DECISION-MAKING

INITIATION OF THE DISCUSSION

When two or more individuals meet to discuss any topic, they negotiate the topic of conversation. This is often implicit through subtle nonverbal clues such as eye contact, gesturing, and body language. Also, they may ask specific questions of one or more people in the group. In classrooms, discussions in small groups are often initiated in the same way in which the teacher begins a total-class interaction, because the teacher decides the topic and speaker. The following transcript is from a fifth grade discussion of the short story "They That Take the Sword" (Meltzer, 1990). At first, the teacher appears to initiate the conversation with a topic by asking any one of the students to begin. However, her own curricular goals cause her to derail her first effort to focus on students' personal response in preference for the curriculum. (Several punctuation marks are used in all transcripts in this chapter to try to represent the pattern and tone of oral comments: emphasized words are italicized; pauses are noted with a slash mark; and comments indicating tone or information that is not easily revealed by the statement are placed in parentheses.)

Teacher: Um, who has a *question* (rising intonation) or *comment* (rising intonation) that you would like to discuss from the story? / Um, by the way, is, is this a fiction or nonfiction?

Juan: Nonfiction.

Lakeshia: Fiction.

Ericka: Fiction. No, No, it's nonfiction.

Shaydia: It's fiction.

Ericka: It's fiction.

Juan: Nonfiction. It's about the U.S. Civil War and Abraham Lincoln.

Teacher: So that would be—

(Many children talking. They do not seem to be agreeing.)

Ericka: Fiction.

Teacher: True. Nonfiction. We all agree on that, Lakeshia?

Lakeshia: (Too softly to hear)

Teacher: Nonfiction. This is different than the one that we read on Monday and discussed on Tuesday.

Ericka: I like this one because—

Teacher: Okay. How many / prefer / a nonfiction one?

Juan: I like this one better. (laughs)

Teacher: You like this, oop. This is unanimous. (Students raised their hands to indicate their preference.) We *all* prefer the nonfiction uh, piece best. Okay. Who'd like to start out?

The teacher immediately directs the group's attention to genre and dominates the beginning of the conversation. Although her questions may reveal a curricular goal of testing students' knowledge, the purpose in this context is questionable depending on the teacher's goals. An examination of students' knowledge might be better achieved in a total-class context if the teacher wants to determine whether or not to provide additional instruction. However, such a canvassing may be more effective *before* reading a text to help activate students' prior knowledge and adopt a stance for reading. The teacher may select a small-group context for this question if his or her purpose is to explore student thinking about genre. None of the students' comments reveals anything about *why* they reached their conclusions. Students make a choice of either "fiction" or "nonfiction," but never identify whether they know the difference and the teacher never probes their answers. Even when Juan provides support for his choice, "It's about the Civil War and Abraham Lincoln," the teacher never expands on this. Instead, she seems to focus more on consensus-building.

Initiating the conversation with a focus on genre is evidence of the teacher's curricular goals determining the content of discussion rather than topics students want to discuss. Knowing the genre of a text is important before reading to help students activate their prior knowledge, but doing so after reading seems to serve little purpose except to control the conversation. The influence of curricular goals on student thinking will surface again in the next section of transcript, which reinforces the conclusion that the teacher's initiation of the conversation has subtly set the criterion for their talk: school-related topics.

TURN-TAKING

In addition to the ways in which teachers initiate small-group discussion, the way they encourage students to attain the conversational floor also influences the direction and content of the conversation. In a subsequent section of the same small-group discussion, the teacher maintains responsibility for the participation by deciding the content and order of turn-taking just as she would in whole-class interactions. Close examination of the interaction reveals two major traits: the I-R-E interactional pattern discussed above and a routine form of turn-taking, "going around the circle." Adopting this format causes students to have few occasions to articulate their personal responses, resulting in more general comments related to the text. In addition to the interactional pattern, close analysis of the students' comments reveals that they have uncovered little about their thinking related to the story.

Teacher: Now, I'd like you to go around uh, starting with Ericka and Lakeshia and Shaydia and Juan and give a reason why.

Juan: I like the story because—

Teacher: Ooh, just a minute. We'll, we'll go in order... So Ericka, *why* do you like this better?

Ericka: Well, because it's nonfiction. It's true and / um,/ and has a good, a lot of good parts in it. And it's a *lot* better than the the tall tale.

Teacher: All right.

Lakeshia: Um,

Teacher: Lakeshia? Uh-huh. Why did you like this one?

Lakeshia: I liked it because um it was my first time readin' it, not-not old news or anything and it was true, and it had a lot of good expressions.

Teacher: All right. Shaydia? How do you feel about it? Why did you prefer it?

Shaydia: Well, um, it tells that um, he didn't, he didn't like slavery and um, it wasn't right and um, I, I don't think it's right to own anyone, 'cause nobody owns anyone themselves, because like if um, our mothers they tell us what to do and it's right, so that we can do some of the work. And it's not right to own anybody and make 'em slaves only if like they want to be, like now they have maids and they're doing that because it's their job and like they want to. And um, slaves are like in *Roots* they were captured and it's kind of scary—it looks scary. And they had the chains around 'em and they called 'em black monkeys and um, they-they-they do it like they sell um, cows. They're like good looking/ um / And that's not right. It's not right. (Unclear statement)

Mrs. Miller: Okay. Juan?

Juan: Well, I liked it because it's nonfiction and it talks a little about the Civil War and plus sort of what like Shaydia said.

In this segment of the discussion, the teacher establishes the order in which students participate and the content of what students should share, "I'd like you to go around starting with Ericka and Lakeshia and Shaydia and Juan and give a reason why." Although such a procedural approach leads to orderliness, it fosters an interaction that requires little participation from the students. They are free to make one comment when it is their turn, but are not required to listen to one another, build on one another's ideas, clarify their thinking for others, or make explicit connections between their comment and the text.

In this discussion, students each take a turn by expressing an idea, but then they fall silent. The teacher follows each student's comment with an evaluation, "Okay," before the next child begins his or her turn. Only Shaydia provides an extended response that reveals her personal connections to the text. However, the teacher's evaluation is the same for her answer as it was for all the others. The teacher may have been trying to provide a safe environment for responses by evaluating all responses equally, but the subtle message to students is that all answers, those that are expanded as well as those that are brief, will receive equal acknowledgement.

As this demonstrates, such an interactional pattern allows for orderly turn-taking, but, perhaps because the discussion is both teacher-led and teacher-controlled, it inhibits interactions among the children since they speak only to the teacher and wait for her approval. Further, it does not require students to assume responsibility for the conversation or to listen to one another, leading to passivity and lack of engagement with ideas. Therefore, the students' participation in the discussion is determined by preestablished rules governing behavior, not interest in the topics on the conversational floor.

Close inspection of student responses reveals little substance. Ericka states she liked the story because it is nonfiction, it had "good parts," and it is "better than a tall tale" (a genre they had read previously). Lakeshia states that it was her first reading of it, it is nonfiction, and it had "good expressions." Juan's reasons are that it is nonfiction, it "talks a little about the Civil War," and "sort of what...Shaydia said." These answers share three interesting characteristics. Ericka, Lakeshia, and Juan provided three reasons, referred to the genre, and provided no support for any reason they listed.

Why each student listed three reasons is unclear, but it may be evidence of "language for performance" (Barnes, 1992). Instead of using language to explore ideas and to talk with one another, they try to convey an oral "final draft" to demonstrate they have an answer to the teacher's question. Ericka's answer had three parts, and the teacher evaluated it as acceptable, so perhaps the others assumed this was the correct number of parts for an answer.

Their references to genre were undoubtedly influenced by the teacher's initial question. As evidence of performance the students wanted to prove they remembered and preferred this genre. The teacher may be pleased with their answers, but the students never uncover what they actually know or think about nonfiction text since a preference without rationale seems to be sufficient. Students' comments about genre could be valuable contributions to a conversation if they communicate more information about their thinking. The teacher could have probed for this but chose not to. Perhaps this was because in a total-class discussion, there is no time to explore every student's answer. However, even though this is a small-group context, she seems to have maintained the same pattern that she adopted for whole-class discussions. Another possibility is that, in remembering the initial exchange, the teacher has assumed that they are all thinking similar thoughts about genre. Even if this is true, the final characteristic of their answers is troubling because it demonstrates little substance and no teacher exploration.

All three students' answers provided slight glimpses into what they thought about the story either through vague reference to good parts or by identifying one thing they liked in particular (better than a tall tale, first reading, Civil War setting), but the teacher never asked them to expand, clarify, or elaborate their answers. She accepted all responses equally and let students assume their answers were clear even though they have revealed little about their thinking related to the text.

Together, these two segments of the teacher-led, small-group discussion demonstrate how the teacher's establishment of the topic and the order of turn-taking may heavily influence students' responses. In addition, teachers can also negatively influence student discussions by emphasizing particular content over other, equally valuable issues. The next segment of transcript provides an example of this.

PREFERENCES FOR PARTICULAR TOPICS OVER OTHERS

When Rosenblatt (1978) argued for intense experiences with literature, she was talking about the important connections children can make between the texts and their own lives. Such connections make reading more meaningful. One way students can learn the value of these connections and strengthen their own ability to relate texts to their lives is to discuss these ideas with peers. Small groups may be the best context for children to share their responses since they will have a greater likelihood of being able to talk, and there are fewer peers listening, making it more likely that they will share personal comments.

One potential risk for teachers encouraging students to pursue their own interests related to texts is that they may find themselves in a conversation about issues that may seem unrelated to the curriculum. If student topics are not perceived to be related to the curriculum, such interactions may be viewed as a waste of students' time. The next section of transcript demonstrates that our practices can hamper student choice, even when related to the text, if we decide our curricular goals are more important. In this segment of the discussion, a conversation about white slavery is initiated by the students; however, the teacher encourages the group to pursue a discussion about the title of the story.

Shaydia: Well, they, they, oh, I figure that they used black people for slaves and not white people. I know I, they never said anything about white slaves.

Teacher: Do you think / do you think there've ever *been* white slaves in the world?

Ericka: Un-uh. (negative)

Juan: There used to...

Ericka: Not true.

Juan: There used to be 'til they found out that they they get too tired quick and then they started picking blacks because they have more melanin in their skin and don't get tired under the sun.

Teacher: So, it

Ericka: I never heard of that.

Juan : Mr. Boil told us.

Ericka: I never heard of that.

Teacher: Mm-hmm. Um, what about the title? / Is that one of your questions, Juan?

Juan: No, but I don't know what it is, but...

Teacher: What does the title mean?

Juan: I–I wanted to ask who was the title talkin' about? (One of the children laughs)

Teacher: Okay. Good. Good. Let, let's talk about that.

When Shaydia introduces white slavery as a topic of conversation, the teacher follows by questioning the existence of white slaves. Ericka joins the discussion indicating her disbelief that such a practice ever took place; however, Juan continues by sharing his knowledge of white slavery and the reasoning behind the rationale that blacks made better slaves. The introduction of this topic could have been a teachable moment since Ericka revealed she knew nothing about white slavery. Further, one key aspect of "They That Take the Sword" is how one individual wrestles with his beliefs about slavery. Thus, the topic of white slavery is related, though tangentially, to the story. Even if the teacher's prior knowledge about this subject was limited, Juan appears to know something about such practices and could have explained more about what he knew. If his knowledge were limited, the group could then discuss ways of learning more about the issue, either through reading or listening to guest speakers.

However, instead of pursuing this topic, the teacher changed the subject without explanation, not only directing the discussion away from students' interests related to the text, but also toward the curricular emphasis on discussing story titles. She clearly displays her preference for this new focus since she says "Okay. Good. Good. Let, let's talk about that." This shift prevented Juan and the others from expressing their thoughts about slavery, an important aspect of the short story they were discussing. Even if this shift enabled the teacher to make connections between the book and the school curriculum, something she could have done in a whole-class setting, it prevented students from making their own personal connections.

All three of these examples demonstrate how teachers' actions may hamper productive participation among students in a small-group discussion. Further, they demonstrate how both teachers and students can adhere to comfortable discourse patterns even in small-group situations. It is unfair to assume from the transcipt that the teacher is not trying to include student input in her class. At the same time, she has participated in one dominant form of discourse both as a student and a teacher. Breaking the pattern is sometimes extremely difficult.

Does this mean that teachers should not participate in such discussions so that students have opportunities to share their ideas freely? The answer is related more to the kinds of teacher involvement than to an absolute yes or no answer. For example, several researchers have investigated ways that teachers have effectively led small group discussions in which students were active participants (Eeds & Wells, 1989; Kelly, 1990; McGee, 1992; Samway et al., 1991). These studies revealed that teachers could support discussions in which students pursued topics of interest to them. Further, Wiseman, Many, and Altieri (1992) found that teacher guidance was more likely to lead to greater aesthetic response than the interactions in student-led groups. Such research supports the use of teacher-led, small-group discussions, since those studied prompted greater student participation and increased articulation of aesthetic response. Therefore, teachers can reeducate themselves so that they can effectively support increased student participation in groups. Other chapters in this book provide examples of how teachers can enhance their roles in small-group discussions.

WHY STUDENTS SHOULD CONDUCT THEIR OWN DISCUSSIONS

Some educators may question whether there are effective ways for teachers to help students assume responsibility for their own small-group discussions. Many researchers argue that student responsibility in literacy learning is both possible and essential. For example, Pearson (1993) noted several studies that found that students can accept greater responsibility for their own literacy development than many current classroom contexts allow. Au (1993) argues that even though children of diverse backgrounds are more likely to gain from systematic instruction focused on group processes, such instruction can be conducted for the entire class and followed by children conducting their own discussions while the teacher monitors the activity. Purves and his colleagues (Purves, Rogers, & Soter, 1990) appear to agree, saying that children can discuss texts on their own in small groups as long as they have guidelines for conducting the discussion, the topics, and the tasks to complete. Even stronger support for student-led discussions is Cazden's (1988) argument that the *only* way to change the dominant interactional pattern and the associated roles is to include more peer groups.

TEACHERS' INSTRUCTIONAL SUPPORT FOR STUDENT-LED GROUPS

If students can benefit from assuming responsibility for their own discussions, teachers may be left wondering how to provide the necessary support and instruction. If teachers accept the argument that there are benefits to student-led discussions, how can they encourage learners to set an appropriate context for their conversations and engage in meaningful talk? Investigations on the Book Club Program (McMahon, Raphael, & Goatley, 1995; Raphael & McMahon, 1994) revealed that instruction designed to support students as they learn to conduct their own discussions surrounding texts is most beneficial when teachers focus on both the *how* and the *what* of a literature discussion.

INTERACTING IN SMALL-GROUP DISCUSSIONS

Teacher-led and teacher-directed discussions dominate most classroom settings; therefore, students need instruction that either introduces other patterns or, more likely, reminds them of interactional styles they have experienced in other contexts. Such instruction focuses on *how* to participate in groups using interactional patterns that differ from the school norm. Most conversations outside school do not follow the same round-robin format of classrooms, nor does one individual adopt a leadership role of a teacher—identifying speakers, confining and evaluating their talk, and determining the content of the conversation. Instead, speakers contribute when they have something to say; their comments are either accepted, expanded, or challenged by the group; the content is determined by the group's interest; and their comments frequently overlap one another. A pattern of shared responsibility for the discussion seems to provide students greater latitude to express, support, and extend ideas related to the text.

In order to change students' interaction patterns in school, teachers need to provide explicit models of the conversations they hope students will have in their groups. Two teachers who worked on the book club project, Laura Pardo and Deb Woodman, (real names) chose several means of achieving this: modeling, transcripts, and audio- and videotaped recordings.

MODELING. As a first step, Pardo and Woodman had adults model both poor conversations and productive, positive book discussions that paralleled casual conversations many of us have had about books, movies, and plays. This enabled the teachers to provide instruction on constructive analysis in a context where those being criticized were not likely to be hurt by commentary from unskilled critics. Further, the teachers were able to control the interactions in many ways since they requested some very specific behaviors in the adult groups—ones that they had witnessed while circulating among their own students. Therefore, many students saw their own behaviors mirrored in the adult groups. The adults exaggerated their parts at first, being rude, interrupting one another, and ignoring others' comments.

Once the adults had modelled a discussion, the teachers asked students to critique the form of interaction, stressing constructive criticism. Both teachers directed their students to begin by describing what the group did well before focusing on what needed improvement. Even with the most rude and unproductive conversation, the students were encouraged first to say what the group had done successfully. For example, some members of the group may have listened to the speaker and built on his or her ideas when speaking, and others may have made explicit connections between text events and their personal lives. Afterwards, the focus turned toward areas that needed improvement. Teachers stressed that students needed to address comments and behavior that could prevent others from participating in the group. Rudeness, yelling, and ignoring someone's comments were all possible areas that needed attention. As a total class, with the teacher leading the interaction, students discussed effective ways to communicate a conflicting idea, to shift the conversation away from a dominating peer, and to encourage student members to participate. Once teachers thought that their classes had sufficient skill at positive criticism in this setting, they proceeded to the next step—reading transcripts of their own groups.

"As a total class, with the teacher leading the interaction, students discussed effective ways to communicate a conflicting idea, to shift the conversation away from a dominating peer, and to encourage student members to participate."

TRANSCRIPTS. Both teachers in this project taped the student-led discussions two or three times a week. They then transcribed some of these, using much the same format presented in transcripts for this chapter. Speakers' identities were hidden by using pseudonyms, their talk was represented as closely as possible to the way they spoke, and overlapping talk was noted. Once these teachers had prepared the transcripts for their classes, they handed each student a copy and asked some of them to role-play the conversation, reading the transcript as written. Then, as a class, the students discussed what the group on the transcript had done well and what they needed to improve (see Wiencek's description of "debriefings" in this volume for related ideas). This activity enabled the teacher to highlight in very explicit ways the goals for the student-led groups. They could focus student attention on interactional patterns to identify when someone appeared to be "taking their turn" compared to when someone was responding to an earlier comment, or when someone had been rude to a peer. As with the modeled groups, teachers continued at this level of critique until students appeared ready to move on to the next phase—listening to the tapes of their groups.

TAPES. At first, the teachers asked students to listen to a tape of one of their groups as an entire class, again, with the assumption that students still could benefit from direct supervision of this activity. Also, the focus remained both on what a group did well and what needed improvement. Later, students listened to tapes of their own groups and critiqued them in writing for the teacher, explaining what the group had done well and identifying goals for the future. In addition, the teachers asked individual students to critique their own participation in the group, also attending to both positive aspects and areas that needed improvement. Once the teachers were satisfied that students were thoughtful critics of the audiotapes, they then introduced videotapes, following the same strategies with the added dimension of students' physical behaviors (making eye contact vs. looking around, and moving closer to the group vs. pulling away from the group).

Together, these activities continued to help students explicitly address their needs when interacting in small groups, so they contributed to quality conversations about texts. As part of a research project, Pardo and Woodman had some resources that all teachers may not have. For example, transcribing tapes requires a lot of time. However, once the transcripts are finished, they can be used in future classes since students new to the practice of leading their own discussions probably experience similar problems. Furthermore, some teachers may find that all four formats (modeling, transcripts, audio- and videotapes) are not necessary for their students and that some combination will work better for them. The key is not in replicating exactly the practices Pardo and Woodman adopted. Instead, it is to find ways to make existing interactional patterns and the goals for good conversations explicit for students. Further, this should be provided within whole-class instruction so that the teacher can clarify goals for *how* students interact in their peer-led groups.

WHAT TO DISCUSS IN SMALL GROUPS

As with instruction on the discourse patterns, Pardo and Woodman also provided explicit instruction on the content of their discussions. Since most students' experiences had been with school discussions directed by the teacher, expecting them to introduce topics for discussion without assistance might lead to unproductive groups. When deciding for themselves, many students become either mired in more traditional topics or begin talking about anything that comes to mind whether related to the text or not.

In one group, a student asked her peers specific, factual questions related to the text, just as a teacher might. She began by asking a peer to restate the title and author. When the peer answered correctly, she then asked another group member to name the main character. She proceeded in this way, evaluating their answers as right or wrong, until all her questions were answered; then the group fell silent.

In another group, students never talked about the text at all, preferring one-on-one conversations about other things. Thus, Pardo and Woodman realized they needed to provide models and specific instruction on the kinds of response acceptable for conversations about books, including (a) personal connections to texts, (b) literary elements, and (c) evaluation of the text.

PERSONAL CONNECTIONS. Many teachers and students have learned that literature discussions should focus on factual, comprehension-check questions. Students feel that the first need is to prove they have read all of the text and remembered significant details. Although this is indeed an important instructional goal, constructing meaning from texts is more difficult unless we can personally connect to them. Therefore, teachers need to remind students that their personal reactions are important aspects of book talks. Because such conversations frequently wander to other memories prompted by reading, teachers worry when such talk, rooted in personal connections, may at times seem to take students away from talk focused on the book. It is important to remember that these wanderings cause us to understand the text, remember the book better, and empathize with characters. Thus, it is important for students to talk about personal connections between texts and their lives.

Both Woodman and Pardo used whole-class discussions as forums in which they modeled how to incorporate personal response. For example, sometimes a chapter was read aloud to the class. When a section prompted a personal response, the teacher stopped reading and stated how she was relating to the story. One day while Pardo was reading *Tuck Everlasting* (Babbitt, 1975) she stopped and said, "This made me realize how hard Winnie's decisions about eternal life really were. I might think it would be fun to drink water from the spring and live forever. But I would also be sad if I had eternal life and had to watch my own two children grow up and die." She then continued reading, but later asked students whether they would want to live forever. Her comments demonstrated to her class that personal connections to texts are legitimate topics for conversation in class.

> ***"Teachers need to remind students that their personal reactions are important aspects of book talks."***

LITERARY ELEMENTS. In many classes over the course of several lessons, teachers cover the required components of any literary work. Students are asked to identify elements of the plot, discuss aspects of main characters, and identify the theme. Often students demonstrate this knowledge answering questions on work sheets. In contrast, student-led discussions are powerful contexts in which students can share their thinking and learning about these elements. Therefore, Pardo and Woodman provided instruction on literary elements and then discussed how this could be incorporated into the small-group discussions. For example, with a writing prompt, students were asked to select their favorite character and explain why. Once they had written their ideas, they discussed them in their student-led groups. These topics not only facilitated interesting conversations, but also caused students to explore their own thinking related to the textual features.

Teachers trying to encourage such topics within student-led groups should provide instruction first on the literary element, then provide examples of ways to include these areas in their discussions. This does not mean some students will not pursue such topics on their own, because some will. However, providing explicit instruction supports those students who already want to pursue these topics and furnishes examples for others who perhaps never consider these as interesting or legitimate areas to discuss. Also, sometimes students are not necessarily interested in talking about these elements of literature, and they may want to discuss topics they are more interested in. Ultimately, the teacher must decide the best context for the discussion and encourage students to participate. Some issues are important enough that they deserve attention during whole-class discussion; others will be sufficiently attractive that students will want time to discuss them in small, peer-led groups.

EVALUATING TEXTS. An unfortunate result of much of traditional teaching has been that many students leave schools believing that they have no right to criticize good literature even though they have frequently not enjoyed some texts. Providing instruction on how to investigate our reactions to literature so that we can articulate the reasons for our response will strengthen students' sense of themselves as accomplished readers. Once students realize they do not have to like every text, they are then free to examine why they prefer some texts over others. Teachers can model this, provide avenues for students to pursue their own thoughts, and encourage them to discuss it in their groups.

For example, a teacher may not personally enjoy reading fantasy, but many students might. To honor their choice of genre, the teacher could include a book such as *Tuck Everlasting* as a text for the class to read and discuss. The teacher could then express criticism of the book, explicitly listing objections. In response, students who enjoyed the genre might argue these ideas, providing evidence for why the book was worth reading. Those who shared in the criticism might also voice their dislike of the genre. The debate could help students realize that each of us responds differently to texts. By supporting an environment in which students and the teacher can express conflicting opinions, two goals can be accomplished at one time. First, it is acceptable to dislike a book or a genre. Second, examples of specific elements to critique are presented so that when students discover a text they do not like, they can draw from this model. This can result in more lively discussions within the groups about whether they would recommend a book to others and if they would select the genre or author again in the future.

Teachers who want to let students assume responsibility for their own group discussions need to support their efforts with explicit instruction on both the *how* and *what* of their conversations. A few words of caution about both of these.

First, such instruction should be grounded in the needs of a particular class of students. Some teachers may help students understand the discourse pattern they want them to adopt by simply explaining that they should have casual conversations like the ones their families have at dinner. Other learners may need even more support than Pardo's and Woodman's classes did.

Second, all this takes time and requires specific instruction. Some students make remarkable progress on leading their own discussions while others struggle, but all can benefit. Further, the teacher cannot provide instruction, at one time, for all aspects that eventually will be included. The process of modeling and critiquing the *how* of interactions described above took an entire semester. Students showed continual progress but did not immediately become proficient. Some individuals suffered setbacks while others progressed without any apparent difficulty. The students participating in Book Club had at least four years of experience with the teacher assuming responsibility for leading discussions. No one expected that their adjustment to the new expectations would be immediate.

To demonstrate both the possibilities and the frustrations of student-led groups, an examination of a transcript of a student-led discussion will be presented. Similar issues covered previously also apply to this section: (a) initiating the discussion, (b) establishing turn-taking, and (c) choosing topics for conversation. All of these students had participated in discussions with many of the instructional strategies previously described in terms of the *how* and *what* of an interaction.

Student Decision Making

Initiating the Discussion

Teachers frequently initiate a discussion by deciding on the speaker and the topic for conversation. In the following section of transcript, Desiree, the self-proclaimed leader of the fifth grade group, initiates the discussion of "They That Take the Sword" by asking a question. Two aspects of this discussion differ significantly from the teacher-led discussion described earlier: (a) the question is directed to anyone in the group, and (b) the question is very broad, enabling members to select a specific topic for discussion.

Desiree: What did you guys think about the story?
Anthony: It was, ah, okay.

Roger: It's sad. (mumbles something)

Tom: I know because. Just, just because…

Roger: It was sad, but it was good. 'Cause the guy, 'cause the guy stood up for his right, and he died for it.

Tom: Right. And—

Anthony: He didn't die, he went to prison.

Tom: Why did they?

Roger: He died. He sorta died.

Tom: Why did they want to kill him? Just because he didn't wanna fight?

Desiree: Because he's supposed to fight for what he wants.

Roger: But did anyone die in this book?

Anthony: They didn't.

Desiree: He did at the end, but they said he died quietly.

Anthony: They didn't have to kill him. I mean they didn't have to want to kill him just because,

Desiree: Not everyone (mumbles).

Roger: He dies at the end.

Desiree: How come no one shot him?

Anthony: 'Cause they put him in prison.

Desiree: They what?

Tom: Because he wouldn't listen.

Desiree: Why do you think he didn't want to go to war?

Tom: Because he, 'cause he didn't believe in killing people. It says right here.

Anthony: It was a good story.

These students appear to struggle somewhat as they begin—just making the same kinds of general evaluative comments that Ericka, Juan, and Lakeshia made in their group. The difference is that as soon as Roger begins to provide specific support for his evaluation that the story is both sad and good, his peers join the discussion to state their opinions. Furthermore, by using a broader definition of "participation" as a means of evaluating this conversation, all components are present: speaking, listening, expanding, clarifying, and encouraging others to engage. All four students are listening and responding to previous comments.

Unlike the teacher-led group where students sit quietly waiting their turn, these students join the discussion when they have an opinion to contribute, demonstrating that they are listening to one another. The form of this discourse is more like a conversation with overlapping talk and turns decided by individual participants. Also, the content begins at the same general level as the teacher-directed group, but quickly provides support for each member's position. This discussion is more lively and engaging while also providing more specific information about what students are thinking. As we can see, turns are decided on the spot, as speakers want to contribute until everyone joins the discussion. Such total involvement is not always the norm. To examine this, we will discuss another group of fifth graders discussing another text.

TURN-TAKING

As I mentioned above, students often need time to adjust to the new expectations for leading their own groups. Sometimes they all contribute equally, but when some members become engaged in a debate, turn-taking is determined by who wants to clarify, elaborate, and challenge a peer's comment. In the next section of transcript, students are expressing their ideas related to the novel, *Tuck Everlasting*. During the discussion, they demonstrate how they are using language not only to express an opinion, but also to clarify, elaborate, and challenge one another's ideas. Further, they are clearly listening to one another and directing their own conversation. At the same time, two students dominate this part of the discussion.

Camille: My best part but I think in the book, of the story, of the whole thing, I think, is when they got romantic. And when she, I think if we do read the, what's it called?

Crystal: Epilogue.

Camille: Epilogue. I think she will drink the water before she is 17.

Crystal: When she is 17?

Camille: Before.

Crystal: *When* she's 17 because they are gonna like take all the water when she is 17. She drinks the water. She goes and marries him or something like that.

Camille: She's gonna do it *before* she said she was 17 though. That's what I Think. And um / um / um

Crystal: But Winnie is going to go into the woods and, I think that Winnie is gonna to go into the woods and drink the water cuz she thinks it won't work. She thinks that they're just a bunch of crazy people but they're her friends still. I said she thinks they're just a bunch of crazy people. I bet cha' she'll go in and check it when they leave. Fifteen? Thirteen? Fifteen? Somethin' like that?

Joshua: Yeah.

Crystal: Not, not old enough to drink or nothing like that.

Latrice: I think she will take it when she is 17 because, Tuck told her to.

As with the other student-led group, all members in this discussion are participating either by speaking, listening, expanding, clarifying, or encouraging others to engage. However, the amount of talk contributed by each group member varies. Camille and Crystal interact the most, revealing their thinking about when the main character will drink from the eternal spring. When Camille needs clarification of the last section of the book, the epilogue, Crystal provides it. Further, Crystal responds directly to Camille's comment about when she thinks Winnie will drink from the well, and they debate their differing perspectives. Crystal then expands and clarifies her argument about when Winnie will drink from the well.

Like the other student-led interaction, all four students are participating in this conversation, but to different extents. Even though Camille and Crystal are the primary speakers in this section of the transcript, the other two students are listening, as evidenced by their comments. Although the extent of talk differs, all these students are sharing ideas, building on another's comments, and not waiting for someone's evaluation and permission. Thus, their increased language use provides them with additional opportunities to express, clarify, elaborate, and support their responses to the text.

PREFERENCES FOR PARTICULAR TOPICS OVER OTHERS

The third aspect of the teacher-led group discussed previously was the means through which topics of conversation were selected. In the teacher-led group, it appeared that the curriculum seemed to determine which topics were valued. As with the teacher-led group, some proposed subjects in the student-led group were also dismissed while others were pursued. In contrast, student interest appeared to determine what subjects they chose to discuss instead of curricular issues. In the following discussion about "They That Take the Sword," Desiree tries to initiate a conversation about the main character, Seth. However, after some initial confusion about the name, another student's question causes her to select the topic of slavery, which the group finds more interesting.

Desiree: What did you guys think about the man?

Tom: The what?

Desiree: About what's his name.

Troy: Slaves.

Tom: Selth?

Desiree: Selth, or somethin' like that.

Troy: Slavery?

Desiree: Yeah, what did you guys think about slavery? What about you, Anthony, what do you think about slavery?

Anthony: It's sad, 'cause everybody else do some work for somebody else.

Troy: I know, if I had to do some work for somebody they don't want. They could work for.

Tom: That gives Anthony a chill too.

Desiree asks another open-ended question, trying to initiate a discussion; however, Troy submits a one-word suggestion for discussion—slaves. This apparently appears more attractive as a topic because Desiree shifts her question to slavery. This leads to more personal connections to the text and to a brief interaction about slavery. Thus, Desiree's initial topic for discussion is side-tracked for another topic that students appeared more interested in. The discussion of slavery appears to be more interesting to the students, provides a better opportunity for all students to learn from one another, and furnishes a means of exploring the main character. It may be interesting to note that in the teacher-led discussion presented earlier, students also expressed an interest in discussing slavery as well. However, the teacher diverted this topic in favor of another. As teachers, we may want to question how often our values derail students' interests and limit their ability to discuss issues that concern them.

Another aspect of Desiree's initial attempts to engage her peers in a conversation is worth noting. She tries to prompt a conversation focused on the character. This topic might be applauded by a teacher since it centers on one literary element, characterization. At the same time, her peers are apparently not interested in pursuing this. If a teacher were leading the discussion, she may hold to this goal because it is part of the curriculum. Students would answer her questions but not engage in the topic. In the peer-led group, students are free to reject the subject for one they find more meaningful. This brings up a point made earlier in this chapter—the teacher still can focus on this topic, but instead of doing it in the small-group discussion, she can lead a total-class interaction, highlighting her curricular needs.

> ***"In the peer-led group, students are free to reject the subject for one they find more meaningful...the teacher still can focus on this topic, but instead of doing it in the small-group discussion, she can lead a total-class interaction, highlighting her curricular needs."***

As presented earlier, there are two classroom contexts in which to use oral language—whole class and small group. Each of these should have different instructional foci. What is currently interesting to students as they try to construct meaning with texts may dominate some discussions. A good example of how students' daily lives influence their reading of texts occurred later in the same student-led group.

As students continued to talk about "They That Take the Sword," a short story set during the Civil War, they revealed connections between that war and the then current War in the Persian Gulf. Interesting to note is Roger's frustration because he thinks this interaction is not about the story.

Desiree: What do you guys think about war?

Anthony: Cold.

Roger: Same thing, there's no purpose for war either.

Tom: Stupid! I know!

Roger: It's idiocy.

Anthony: What's the use of fighting war when they're gonna blow up all the oil anyway.

Tom: That was the *Civil* War.

Roger: It's stupid right now.

Anthony: (unclear word) they don't fight.

Desiree: Action shouldn't be fought right now?

Anthony: Yeah, right now.

Roger: Idiots (unclear comment), how dumb right now.

Anthony: It's stupid.

Tom: All war is! Just like Mr. Cable said, war is crazy.

Desiree: What do you think about the war a long time ago? And, what do you think about the war now?

Tom: It's stupid.

Roger: They're different. War's a long time ago and war now is totally different.

Tom: And the Persian Gulf - it's stupid! / 'Cause I heard on a TV movie, when we were watching that movie yesterday, kids' questions and answers about the War in the Persian Gulf that Mrs. Pardo had on tape, and there was this one girl said, "I think Saddam Hussein is doing right. He should have taken it over. He shouldn't give up."

Roger: I agree with that one little kid that said we should kill him.

Tom: I know.

Anthony: If Saddam Hussein had got outta there, there wouldn't have been a war. See?

Troy: He dumped half of that oil in the Persian Gulf anyway!

Roger: Right.

Desiree: I know. He said he didn't.

Troy: I know!

Roger: We're talkin' about the wrong war.

Desiree: Why do you think that he put the oil in the water anyways?

Roger: We're talkin' about, We're talkin' about the war.

Tom: 'Cause he, 'cause so the umm—

Desiree: The ships in the Persian Gulf can't get close to the land, so they fire power. / Do you think that he's he's he's kinda aware of his own allies?

Tom: I think he did it! I think he did it!

Desiree's question prompts an extended conversation relating how group members feel about the War in the Persian Gulf. The interactional pattern is marked by overlapping talk, questions asking for opinions or elaboration, elaboration and extension of ideas, and active engagement. Students are not passively waiting for their turn. Instead, they are sharing ideas as they think of them. Further, the content reveals the personal connections they are making to the text. On one hand, readers might assume what Roger did—they were talking about the wrong war so this was a waste of time. However, in "They That Take the Sword," the main character, Seth, must decide whether to fight in the Civil War. As a Quaker, he is opposed to slavery, but he is also opposed to warfare. His choice is to avoid fighting, which causes him to be arrested and tortured for his beliefs; however, his conviction that war is evil remains. Many of the students participating in this group were seeing family members and friends being sent to the Persian Gulf. Their discussion reveals their own tensions and frustrations with the war. This focus caused them to be more engaged in the conversation because of the personal connections they were making. Such strong personal responses will facilitate their ability to understand the main character, Seth, and his reasons for going to jail intead of fighting.

This transcript reveals the strong personal opinions these students hold related to current events. At the same time, the discussion leaves much to be desired for any teacher assessing the content and depth of the ideas presented. In many instances, students provide single-word answers without elaboration. This segment of transcript was included to provide evidence that change takes time. This discussion occurred in January, only four months after students began assuming responsibility for their own groups. Although they made substantial progress in leading their own literature discussions, as their interactional pattern and the content illustrates, they still had much to learn.

CONCLUSIONS

This chapter presents an explanation of how teachers' practices can hamper students' thinking and response related to texts when participating in small-group discussions. It also explains how teachers can support students in leading their own discussions. The intent is not to argue that student-led discussions are always preferable to teacher-led groups. Teachers sometimes need to direct the content and flow of a class discussion. At the same time, students can benefit from opportunities to discuss their own issues related to the texts they are reading. Leading their own discussions enables learners to participate in talk that explores their thinking. In the small-group setting, students can try new ideas, express emerging thoughts, and test their ability to articulate arguments for others. Further, students learn to ask for clarification, elaboration, and support when necessary to understand the speaker's position. In a student-led group, learners must assume responsibility for the content, direction, and flow of the conversation. This does not occur naturally, however. The teacher must provide instructional support that fosters deeper understandings of participation in groups in terms of *how* to interact and *what* to discuss. Together, appropriate instruction and opportunities to practice will foster more literate discourse among elementary children.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

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PART IV
PERSPECTIVES ON ASSESSING DISCUSSION

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CHAPTER 16

Discussion: Assessing What Was Said and What Was Done

Jane Brady Matanzo

When evaluating the effectiveness of discussion, it is important to consider the quality of the discussions (what was said) and nonverbal behavior (what was done). Assessment strategies should provide a means for the teacher and the students to reflect on what happens during class discussions. The primary focus of this chapter is to assess discussion skills and abilities that involve students in their own evaluation of effective discussion. Specifically, these assessment strategies are designed to actively involve students in self-reflection and self-evaluation.

General suggestions drawn from the current literature on discussion provide guidelines for instructional techniques to facilitate student awareness of their interaction behaviors. Galda, Cullinan, and Strickland (1993) suggest that after a teacher models and guides a discussion that leads to "productive behavior," students should be asked to generate discussion guidelines that can be used to evaluate their effectiveness and degree of participation in the discussion. Cintorino (1993) asserts that students should ask the questions and set the direction the discussion should take in order to construct meaning. According to Kletzien and Baloche (1994), the last few minutes of discussion should be used for students to talk about the ideas they have shared, their observations, the way they synthesized information from others, and how they contributed to the discussion.

Hyman (1980) suggests that feedback is needed from peers and teachers after discussions to help students maintain appropriate discussion behaviors. He stresses that the purpose of feedback is to encourage improvement of the students' participation in future discussions. Anthony, Johnson, Mickelson, and Preece (1991) believe that effective assessment leads to profiles of growth and achievement over time by engaging students in learning activities that are collaborative, noncompetitive, and reflective of how language is constructed by the learner. Furthermore, Wiencek and O'Flahavan (1994) suggest that debriefings be held following discussions and that students be given some of the responsibility for the evaluation that takes place at that time (see Wiencek, this volume for further information on debriefings). This process facilitates student awareness of their interactions and helps develop metacognitive awareness of discussion behaviors.

In terms of assessment, discussion needs to be examined multidimensionally. Three dimensions of discussion are addressed in this chapter: (a) discussion behaviors, (b) elements of narrative text, and (c) elements of expository text (items for possible consideration are listed in Figure 1). Each of the categories has infinite possibilities; therefore, the lists should be considered as a representative sample of what could be discussed and evaluated. Teachers are encouraged to examine the current developmental status of

Figure 1
Elements of discussion and content to consider in assessment.

Discussion behaviors	*Narrative content to discuss*	*Expository content to discuss*
Relate ideas to background	Title appropriateness	Title appropriateness
Avoid interruptions	Character analysis	Author organization of text
Take turns	Plot analysis	Treatment of topic
Listen before judging	Theme support	Author's credentials
Stay focused on topic	Points of view	Effectiveness of examples
Explore topic in depth	Dialogue effectiveness	Author's clarity
Locate support in text	Conflict and resolution	Accuracy
Clarify ideas	Texts on similar topic, theme	Currency
Acknowledge others' ideas	Character interactions	Completeness of presentation
Question others	Effect of ending	Effectiveness of visuals
Make eye contact	Effect of setting on story	Text comparisons on topic
Project voice appropriately	Character motives	Topic treatment in other genres
Support ideas expressed	Stereotype analysis	Stereotype analysis
Offer creative solutions	Development of story	Compare text to media treatment on same topic
Encourage agreement	Author's use of language (style)	Author's use of language
Reorganize what was said	Effectiveness of illustrations	Sequence of presentation
Avoid ridiculing others' ideas	Compare works of given author	____________________
Extend ideas of others	Compare text to media on book	____________________
____________________	____________________	____________________
____________________	____________________	____________________

their own students in terms of their experience and knowledge of discussion elements and behaviors and modify the lists accordingly. Students also should be encouraged to give input on discussion behaviors and content.

This chapter combines what is known about both discussion and evaluation by presenting a variety of strategies a teacher might use to assess discussion. Each of these strategies has the flexibility to be adapted to most discussion and classroom situations. The strategies are the discussion play, audio- and videotape portfolios, discussion specification sheets, discussion debriefings, and a discussion facilitator checklist.

> *“Modeling clarifies the various elements of discussion and the impact on the discussion if a given element is present or absent.”*

THE DISCUSSION PLAY

In order to evaluate a student's performance as a discussant, it is helpful initially to have discussion behaviors and topics modeled. Modeling clarifies the various elements of discussion and the impact on the discussion if a given element is present or absent. One way of providing such modeling for discussions is to use a discussion play as an example. The discussion play concept was developed by the author and school system staff members (Montgomery County Public Schools, 1982).

THE DISCUSSION PLAY

Book: Jumanji by Chris Van Allsburg
Narrative Focus: Impact of Illustrations on Text
Discussion Behavioral Foci: (1) Stay on subject. (2) Give support for what you say.
Characters: Caitlin, Tim, Marissa, Jamahl, and Ben

Marissa: I liked the illustrations in this book (points to book).

Ben: We need to talk about how they affected the story. I think they added because he (the illustrator) showed much more than he put in words.

Marissa: But sometimes he didn't show what the words said.

Jamahl: What do you mean?

Marissa: Well, on page seven, he says the lion is licking his lips and the lion in the picture is yawning.

Tim: I like lions.

Jamahl: It also says that Peter is giving a bored yawn, not the lion.

Caitlin: I think the lion is roaring but, Jamahl is right. The lion is doing something different than what the words tell.

Tim: I'd rather have the lion growl anyway.

Caitlin: I think some of the drawings are funny.

Marissa: I laughed at the picture of rhinos.

Jamahl: He used different designs on page 13 when the snake was on the mantel.

Tim: I like snakes, too.

Marissa: But, on page 12, it also says that the monkeys, the snake, and the guide were on the couch.

Jamahl: It would be hard to show everything. I guess he wants us to use our imagination some.

Caitlin: I like the charcoal colors.

Tim: It was a good game. I'd like my games to do that. Like if real money would just come in the room when I play Monopoly!

Marissa: I was relieved when the fog cleared. It was like the picture left a fantasy land and came back to what was real.

CLASS DISCUSSION OF THE DISCUSSION PLAY

Teacher: Let's think about what the players did in terms of our purpose for listening. They were to be talking about the impact that the illustrations had on the whole book. Did all members of the discussion group do that?

To'mas: Tim was way off. He talked about lions.

Jon: ...and snakes. It was like he didn't listen to the others.

Emily: He never talked about the pictures. The last thing he said was about Monopoly. It was a good idea but not what he was supposed to be talking about.

Teacher: Did Tim's comments have any effect on the discussion?

Andrea: The others ignored him.

Mike: I laughed and thought he was funny at the beginning. Then, I wanted him out of the play. I didn't like his part.

Emily: I think if I had Tim in my group, I'd tell him to talk about what we were supposed to. I thought it messed up some of the others' ideas.

Teacher: Did any of the players give support for their ideas?

Shanoya: Jamahl and Marissa were the best!

Kevin: But Marissa didn't give support all the time.

Andrea: Kevin's right. Like in the beginning, she could have given an example where he didn't show what the words said.

Pam: Jamahl was good when he gave page numbers. I turned in my book to look too.

To'mas: Caitlin did give support sometimes. I thought it was good that she brought up the charcoal colors used but she could have told why. She didn't say what the colors did for the book.

Emily: I liked what Marissa said about fantasy and real life. I didn't think of that. When I look now, I think she may be right.

Teacher: You are super detectives! Are there ways we could rewrite this play to make the discussion more effective?

(Class holds general discussion on what might be changed in the play to meet the objectives more fully. The whole class or a designated group of students rewrite the play that was on a computer disk. The revised discussion play is then presented to the class and critiqued a second time in terms of the focus and behavioral objectives).

THE REVISED DISCUSSION PLAY

Marissa: I like the illustrations in this book because each time I look at them I see more things like the china and pieces of wood that could splinter on page 12.

Ben: We need to talk about how the illustrations affected the story. I think they added because Van Allsburg showed much more in the illustrations than what he put in words.

Marissa: He didn't do that all the time. Look on page seven. The lion is not licking his lips.

Ben: You're right. But it looks to me like the lion might be growling. It still doesn't go with the words.

Tim: Maybe we should help him change the words and not the illustrations. It would work if it said the lion was either yawning or growling.

Jamahl: Something should be changed because the pictures and the words don't go together on that page. They do go together on page 8 where the monkeys steal the food.

Caitlin: I was going to say the same thing. Sometimes, though, I like it when Van Allsburg doesn't show everything. It makes me think. Some of the drawings are really funny.

Marissa: I laughed at the picture of the rhinos because of the expressions on their faces. They looked surprised to be there, too!

Jamahl: They were funny looking. He also used different designs on page 13 when the snake was on the mantel wrapped around the clock. The words matched on that page, too.

Tim: The different designs make the picture more interesting. Some of the pictures are plain and some have more detail. I couldn't wait to see what he would show on the next page.

Marissa: I'm still bothered that he doesn't always go with the words. On page 11, it also says that the monkeys, snake, and guide were all on the sofa but he shows only the guide sitting on what looks like a doll house.

Jamahl: It would be hard to show everything. I guess he wants us to use our imagination.

Caitlin: I think the charcoal colors make us use our imagination. Some things are exactly clear but other things have a mystery. I think the colors and style he used add mystery.

Tim: I agree. I don't think I would have liked the book as much if the illustrations were missing.

Marissa: I feel that way, too. The illustrations brought me into the book. I was relieved when the fog cleared at the end. It was like Judy and Peter left a fantasy land and came back to what was real.

Tim: That's exactly what they did!

A discussion play might focus on analyzing a character's traits as well as several discussion behavioral elements such as staying on the subject and expanding on one another's ideas. A discussion play is a script of a discussion in which children take part. Usually there are three to five parts or characters in a discussion play. Players who read each discussant role wear a name tag, or name necklace, with the name of the discussant they are portraying. The purpose for having students assume discussant roles is that, when the play is critiqued by peers, the hypothetical roles will be critiqued by name instead of focusing on the student reading the part. This technique also helps the players analyze the roles they are playing without feeling they are being critical of themselves.

The discussion play can be a short or lengthy presentation depending on the students' ability to assess discussions. It is important to first model a brief discussion play that can be easily followed. Subsequent plays can be developed to include previously modeled objectives, reinforce learned discussion elements, and extend students' knowledge by incorporating one or two new content and behavioral elements. After each discussion play is read, it can be critiqued by students in terms of the given focus and behavioral objectives. Small or whole-class groups may be organized for this purpose. Students should be encouraged to examine the play carefully and to suggest how the roles of each player might better meet the group's objectives. One option is to have students who are listening to the play have copies of the text so they can follow along as the players read. The students can then be encouraged to rewrite the play so that all discussants meet the objectives more effectively.

The discussion play provides a vehicle for modeling and learning to assess discussion in terms of narrative and expository content and verbal and nonverbal behaviors. The play rewrite process affords students the opportunity to write and express meaningful language in play form and to experience vicariously, without personal reprimand, various discussion do's and don'ts.

A teacher, or group of teachers, can develop discussion plays based on appropriate discussion objectives. The listing of discussion behaviors and narrative and expository strategies in Figure 1 may be useful as a planning tool. The steps to consider when developing a discussion play include the following:

1. Observe student discussions and determine what discussion behaviors and narrative or expository foci need to be stressed.
2. Select an appropriate text and/or topic to be discussed which incorporates curricular expectations.
3. Develop a brief discussion scenario written in play form using fictitious names for three to five discussant players with the majority of the players displaying on target behaviors.

Once the discussion play is developed:

1. The students assume the roles of the players and read the story aloud.
2. The class audience and play readers critique the contributions of the discussant players as to whether the given objectives were met.
3. A general class discussion is then held on ways the hypothetical discussion could be improved.
4. The class or a subgroup of students edit and rewrite the dialogue of the discussion play so that all play discussants meet the given objectives.

5. Students critique the revised play and relate what they learned by noting at least one positive aspect of the revised discussion play they would like to incorporate in their future discussions.

After several plays have been presented, critiqued, and revised, groups of students can develop original discussion plays to present to peers that illustrate a variety of discussion situations.

AUDIO- AND VIDEOTAPE PORTFOLIOS

In one school, I worked with a group of five students to help them improve and refine their discussion skills. Initially, audiotapes were made of their discussions and students then listened to and critiqued their own discussion behaviors. Student reactions to listening to the tapes included such comments as, "I repeated what I said too much," "I didn't understand what Megan said, but I forgot to ask her to explain," "I said 'uh' too many times," and "I didn't think before I started talking." During the fourth week a videocamera was introduced. Pairs of students were trained to operate the camera to tape the discussions on a rotating basis.

This allowed all students to participate both as viewers and as discussants. While receiving and listening to the video of the discussion, students were encouraged to check their discussion behaviors against the list of behaviors provided on the discussion data form (see Figure 2). Evaluative comments by students focused on overt behaviors such as "I interrupted Adam twice," and "I forgot what we were supposed to discuss," as well as nonverbal behaviors such as "I shrugged my shoulders and looked frowny," "I looked at the book and not at the group," and "I didn't know I touched my ear so much when I talked."

Video portfolios allow students to view themselves in authentic discussion situations. Classroom video libraries or individual video portfolios with selected excerpts can help students visually and auditorially monitor discussion progress. The accompanying discussion data form helps students assess their progress on specific criteria over a period of time.

DISCUSSION SPECIFICATION SHEETS

Discussion specification sheets, known more popularly to students as spec sheets, are one means for individual students, peers, and teachers to set and monitor expectations for discussion. Each spec sheet is divided into two categories: discussion content and discussion behaviors. Examples are given in Figure 3: specification sheet; narrative selections

Figure 2
Discussion self-evaluation form.

Name: Jorge

Grade: 4

Date	Discussion topics	Used background	Prepared	Analyzed topic	Gave support	Questioned ideas	Drew conclusions	Avoided interrupting	Made eye contact
Sept. 16	Results of science lab on plant growth	2	2	3	2	0	1	3	3
Sept. 25	Character analysis in *Bridge to Terabithia*	3	3	2	1	1	3	2	2
Oct. 2	Compared two books and a news article on whales	2	1	2	1	1	3	1	2

Legend: 3 = Strong; 2 = Did okay; 1 = Could improve; 0 = Did not apply and Figure 4; specification sheet; expository selections. Three columns are included in each spec sheet. Self-evaluation of the items is indicated by a Y for "yes," S for "sometimes," and an N for "no," if the specific item does not occur. This specification sheet can become a part of a student's portfolio and may be used in student-teacher conferences. The steps for using the Specification Sheet include:

1. Determine what discussion foci and behaviors will be highlighted for either a given discussion or a given period of time.

Figure 3
Specification sheet: Narrative selections.

Evaluation Legend:
Y = Yes; S = Sometimes; N = No

Name: Arletta
Date: Feb. 3
Selection(s): Charlotte's Web by E. B. White
Focus: Character interactions

DISCUSSION CONTENT	Self	Friend	Teacher
1. Related own experience to topic	Y		
2. Analyzed ____ (character interactions) ____	S		
3. Linked author's style to element	N		
4. Noted effect of story sequence	Y		
5. Located and read support from text	S		
6.			
7.			

DISCUSSION BEHAVIORS	Self	Friend	Teacher
1. Avoided interruptions	S		
2. Made eye contact with others	S		
3. Questioned others	N		
4. Stayed focused	Y		
5. Thought before contributing	Y		
6. Made helpful contributions	S		
7.			

Best part of discussion: ______________

Figure 4
Specification sheet: Expository selections.

Evaluation Legend:
Y = Yes; N = No; S = Sometimes

Name: Jerome Date: April 6
Selection(s): *Whales: Giants of the Deep* by Henshaw; *Whales* by Simon; Article from *Florida Today*
Focus: Compare/contrast of content

DISCUSSION CONTENT	Self	Friend	Teacher
1. Related own experience to topic	Y		
2. Analyzed accuracy of selection	S		
3. Considered author's credentials	N		
4. Offered examples for support	Y		
5. Related specific ideas to one another	S		
6.			
7.			

DISCUSSION BEHAVIORS	Self	Friend	Teacher
1. Located support from text	S		
2. Stayed focused	S		
3. Showed facial expression when speaking	N		
4. Evaluated contributions by others	Y		
5. Offered to verify/research information	Y		
6. Prepared for discussion	S		
7.			

I am most proud of contributing ______________________________ to
the discussion because ______________________________

2. Develop a spec sheet with the selected behaviors categorized in two categories: discussion content and discussion behaviors.
3. Model each of the discussion behaviors so that students understand the elements involved.

4. Use the spec sheet as a reference during student-teacher conferences and during whole-class discussions about ways to improve the art of discussion.
5. Keep a number of self-selected and completed spec sheets in student portfolios so they may be reviewed periodically to note growth and improvement in various discussion areas.

Note that students are asked to write comments about their discussion performance at the bottom of each spec sheet. Eventually, students should be encouraged to develop their own focus for such comments.

> ***"Debriefings provide one way to engage students in reflecting on and analyzing their discussion abilities."***

Discussion specification sheets can encourage students to focus on both narrative expository content and discussion behaviors. This strategy also provides students with the opportunity to focus on parts of the discussion they thought were particularly effective and to write about them.

DISCUSSION DEBRIEFINGS

"We just debriefed!" is a comment made by a proud fourth grader who had just finished talking about a discussion with his peers and teacher. During the debriefing, this student identified exactly what he needed to work on to improve his discussion skills. Discussions should be discussed, and debriefings provide one way to engage students in reflecting on and analyzing their discussion abilities. It is important that discussion guidelines and goals be set prior to beginning a discussion. Steps to follow in implementing this strategy include the following:

1. Talk about previous discussions prior to holding a new discussion.
2. Decide, based on past experiences, what facets of discussion the group and/or individual students do well or need to improve upon.
3. Write the brainstormed elements on chart paper.
4. Put check marks next to those elements to be emphasized in the upcoming discussion.
5. Hold the discussion.
6. Arrange for a debriefing time after the discussion to talk about the items checked on the prediscussion chart.
7. Circle any items at the end of the debriefing that need additional attention.

Before the next discussion, review the chart to identify foci for subsequent discussions. This strategy is circular because both the teacher and students continue to link what they learned about discussion from past discussions to attain goals in future discussions. This strategy is particularly appropriate for evaluating the effectiveness of a discussion group as a whole (see Wiencek, this volume, for additional information about debriefings).

Discussion debriefings are a catalyst for effecting positive change in discussion patterns by having the students and the teacher link patterns from former discussions to objectives to attain in future directions. Students take the challenge seriously, which results in personal growth in discussion ability.

DISCUSSION FACILITATOR CHECKLIST

Just as the previous strategies help students focus and reflect on their effectiveness as discussants, it is equally important for the teacher and students to reflect on the role of the facilitator of group discussions. Initially, teachers should model the role of the discussion facilitator; however, the ultimate goal is to have students assume this role. Part of the role of the facilitator is to guide the discussion participants and help them be aware of why a discussion is taking place. The discussion facilitator checklist can help the facilitator reflect on what occurred or did not occur during student discussions, the quality and degree of thinking and interaction accomplished, the discussion behaviors exhibited, and what can be done to refine future discussions. Such reflection must be open-ended to allow the teacher and student to include elements relative specifically to his or her group of students. A facilitator checklist is presented in Figure 5 as one example of an evaluative tool that can be used by the discussion facilitator to self-assess the effectiveness of his or her role in discussion. The major purpose of the discussion facilitator checklist is to encourage the facilitator to consider aspects of discussion that are important and to help students self-evaluate their performance as a discussion facilitator.

CONCLUSIONS

Discussion is a real life skill that merits considerable time and attention. Students need to engage in self-evaluation of their discussion skills so that they can effectively evaluate what was said and done during discussions. The strategies and techniques presented in this chapter focus on helping students become more metacognitive about their participation in discussions and help them refine and extend their repertoire of discussing skills.

Figure 5
Discussion facilitator checklist.

Name ______________________ Date __________

Yes	*Sometimes*	*No*	*Discussion item to consider*
___	___	___	1. Do I ask genuine questions to stimulate discussion?
___	___	___	2. Do I guide discussion as needed to keep participants on task and then assume a secondary role?
___	___	___	3. Do I encourage participants to look at one another during discussion?
___	___	___	4. Do I encourage participants to ask one another questions?
___	___	___	5. Do I model discussion behaviors as a discussion group member?
___	___	___	6. Do I model respect for the sharing of others' ideas and opinions?
___	___	___	7. Do I provide opportunities for participants to debrief after discussions?

Planning Do's: Aspects of discussion I need to emphasize in the future are ____________________

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CHAPTER 17

Story Retelling: A Discussion Strategy to Develop and Assess Comprehension

Lesley Mandel Morrow

Educators and teachers alike have long recognized reading stories to children as a beneficial activity. Teachers acknowledge the importance of classroom story times, and generations of parents have read stories to children as part of a bedtime ritual. Theoretical, correlational, and case studies have suggested that reading to youngsters helps them learn about features of written language. They learn that written language is different from oral language, that print generates meaning, and that printed words on a page have sounds (Clay, 1979; Smith, 1978).

Other investigations have found that early readers, including successful readers and children who learned to read before they entered school, tend to have been read to frequently at home (Clark, 1984; Durkin, 1974–75; Morrow, 1983; Teale, 1984). Language development, specifically growth in syntactic complexity and vocabulary, is associated with early read-aloud experiences (Chomsky, 1972). Children to whom stories are frequently read know how to handle books, know which is the front of the book, know which is print to be read, and know the appropriate direction for reading print (Baghban, 1984; Hoffman, 1982). Experimental studies investigating the effects of storybook reading as a regular classroom practice on children's achievement, found that children in the treatment groups scored significantly better on measures of vocabulary, comprehension, and decoding ability than children in the control groups, who were not read to (Feitelson, Kita, & Goldstein, 1986; Morrow, 1986).

What is there in reading stories to children that brings such results? Investigations have found that simply reading to children does not necessarily bring about positive results. The reasons for the enhancement of literacy development seems to be what happens before, during, and after the reading; how the child actively participates in the event; and the style in which the story is read (Green & Harker, 1982; Peterman, Dunning, & Mason, 1985).

A child's active participation, through discussions with adults and peers in book reading experiences, has been found to enhance children's development of comprehension, oral language, and sense of story structure (Blank & Sheldon, 1971; Bower, 1975). The types of story discussion strategies that have been found to be beneficial are as follows.

1. Teachers *manage* by introducing stories with a brief discussion that includes the title of the book plus background information to provide some prior knowledge. They also redirect irrelevant discussion back to the text of the story.
2. Teachers *prompt responses* by inviting children to ask questions or share comments throughout a reading. If a child is not at all responsive, the adult scaffolds or models responses for him or her.
3. Finally, teachers, *support* and *inform*, by reacting to comments and explaining parts of the story when asked. As much as possible, they relate responses to real-life experiences.

Throughout story readings, teachers provide positive reinforcement and praise for children's comments (Applebee, 1980; Morrow, 1985; Roser & Martinez, 1985).

Pellegrini and Galda (1982) found that children's story comprehension and retelling ability improved with their active involvement and peer discussions in story reconstruction through role playing. Zimiles and Kuhns (1976) found that story retelling improved story comprehension in six- to eight-year-olds who were asked to retell a story after it was read to them. Morrow (1985, 1986) carried out three different studies with young children to determine specific instructional benefits of story retelling. Guidance in retelling was offered through prompts and scaffolding responses when children needed assistance. Significant improvement was found for the experimental groups in oral language complexity, comprehension of story, sense of story structure during retelling, and inclusion of structural elements in dictations of the youngsters' original stories. In a study designed to investigate the effects of retelling on the reading comprehension of fourth grade students, Gambrell, Pfeiffer, and Wilson (1985) found that students who engaged in guided retelling practice sessions demonstrated superior performance in reading comprehension to children in a control group who did not participate in guided retelling sessions.

> ***"Retelling requires the reader or listener to integrate information by relating parts of the story to one another and to personalize information by relating it to a person's own background of experience."***

Story retelling seems to be a procedure that enables a child to play a large and active role in reconstructing stories. It also engages adults and children in active discussions. The results of studies suggest that guided story retellings with interactive discussion result in significant improvement in comprehension and recall of discourse. In addition, the reader or listener learns about the organization, interpretation, and retention of text information.

Retelling stories engages a student in holistic comprehension. Retelling requires the reader or listener to integrate information by relating parts of the story to one another and to personalize information by relating it to a person's own background of experience. The strategy follows Wittrock's (1981) model of generative learning. Engaging children in retelling a story reflects a holistic concept of reading comprehension. As an activity, it contrasts with the "piecemeal approach" of traditional teacher-posed questions that require students to respond with specific bits of information about text (Morrow et al., 1986).

This volume focuses on the creation of classroom contexts that foster different types of discussion, interpretation, and comprehension of text. Several definitions of discussion are relevant to fostering reading comprehension (see Almasi, this volume). According to the dictionary, discussion is "talk or writing in which pros and cons or various aspects of a subject are considered." Another definition of discussion is simply stated as "to talk about." This chapter will focus on discussion that deals with "talking about" what a child has read or heard when they are read to, to help them interpret and comprehend the text. The strategy being explored is story retelling. It involves the child in talking about the text and interacting through discussion with the teacher (See Barrentine, this volume, for extended discussion of interactive dialogues). During retellings, teachers encourage children by prompting responses through scaffolding or modeling, asking questions, informing, and offering support for children's comments (see Cairney, this volume, for extended discussion of scaffolding). This chapter will also deal with children's and teachers' assessments of retellings to determine improvement in the interpretation and comprehension of text.

WHAT ARE RETELLINGS?

Retellings are postreading or postlistening recalls in which readers or listeners tell what they remember from their reading or listening. Retelling can be oral or written. According to Johnston (1983) "retelling is the most straightforward assessment...of the result of text/reader interaction" (p. 54). Retelling indicates a reader's or listener's assimilation and reconstruction of text information, and it reflects comprehension. Retelling allows a reader or listener to structure responses according to personal and individual interpretations of text. It is an active procedure that involves the child in the reconstruction of text. It also allows interactive behavior between adult and child as a teacher guides a child through first attempts at retelling through discussion. When children learn to retell, interactive discussions occur between peers as they retell to each other. Retelling encourages both integration and personalization of content, helping children see how parts of the text interrelate and how they mesh with their own experiences (see Hartman & Allison, this volume, for related discussion of intratextual discussion). Retelling follows a model of generative learning (Wittrock, 1981).

> *“Retelling allows a reader or listener to structure responses according to personal and individual interpretations of text.”*

Vygotsky's (1978) definition of higher mental functions as internalized social relationships contributes further to the discussion. With the application of Vygotsky's theory, literacy appears to develop from children's social interactions with others in specific environments where reading, writing, and oral language are involved. The literacy activities and the interactions that are mediated by the adults will determine the ideas about, and skills acquired toward literacy development. Holdaway's (1979) model of developmental teaching indicates that children benefit most when their earliest experiences with storybooks are mediated by interactive adults who involve them in discussions that require problem solving. The child is asked to respond (in this case, retell the story) and the adult offers information when necessary (in this case, guides the retelling). In such situations, children and adults interact to discuss, construct, reconstruct, and interpret text. One of the goals for retelling is the reconstruction of story meaning through interactive discussion between adult and child. Initially, the interaction during story retelling is interpsychological, as the adult and child reconstruct meaning together. The retelling gradually becomes intrapsychological as the child internalizes the interactions and is able to undertake the retelling task independently (Teale, 1984; Vygotsky, 1978).

THE USE OF STORY RETELLING IN THE CLASSROOM

MODELING STORY RETELLING FOR CHILDREN

The teacher plays a critical role in encouraging story retelling by modeling the activity for children before ever asking them to retell themselves. It should be noted here that retelling stories is a form of storytelling. When selecting a story to retell, a teacher should choose books that have good plot structures: definite *settings*, followed by the introduction of a *theme*, a series of *plot episodes*, and finally a *resolution*. Choose stories that appeal to children, stories they will be able to retell along with you because of predictable elements such as rhyme, catch phrases, and repetition. Be sure to know the story well so that you can retell it accurately. Retelling does not mean memorizing; it means telling the story in your own words. However, if a story includes catch phrases crucial to the story, use them to encourage children to join in the retelling.

Remember that your purpose for retelling stories to children is to provide them with a model to imitate; therefore, you want to do it well. Be expressive while retelling the story; change your voice to reflect dialogue spoken by different characters and to highlight special events. Use both voice and facial expressions. Storytelling is similar to a dramatic presentation. Retell slowly and with animation, but not so dramatically as to overshadow the story. As opposed to reading directly from a book, retelling enables you to shorten stories to accommodate the attention span of your audience. It also enables you to develop a personal relationship with the children since you are able to make eye contact as you retell. Audiotape or videotape your own retellings to observe and critique your technique (Morrow, 1989).

> ***“Children and adults interact to discuss, construct, reconstruct, and interpret text.”***

Discussion That Instructs and Guides Children in Story Retelling

If they have had no prior experience, retelling is not an easy procedure for students, no matter what their age. After modeling retellings for children, it is time for their participation. Children do have difficulty retelling initially, but practice adds to the quality of retellings and to the ease in approaching the task (Morrow, 1985). To help children develop the practice of retelling, they should be told in advance of reading or listening to a text or story that they will be asked to retell it. For example, a teacher might say, “I am going to read a story called (name of story). After I read it, I will ask you to retell it as if you were telling it to a friend who has never heard it before” (Morrow, 1985). Further guidance depends on the purpose for retelling. If the immediate intent is to teach or test sequence, the child should be instructed to concentrate on what happened first, second, and third. If the goal is to teach or assess the ability to integrate information to make inferences from text, or to make intratextual connections, the child should be instructed in retelling to refer to personal feelings or experiences related to the text. When asking children to retell as a teaching technique to reconstruct story meaning, pre- and postdiscussions of the story will often improve the retelling (Irwin & Mitchell, 1983; Morrow, 1985). Follow-up practice sessions in retelling and discussions about the quality of the retelling are also recommended to help a child understand and become accustomed to the task. Retellings can be tape recorded and played back so that children can identify their own strengths and weaknesses in the activity.

Suggestions for eliciting and guiding a child’s retelling follow (Morrow, 1985). This format emphasizes the inclusion of elements of story structure: *setting* (introduction

> ***"Choose stories that appeal to children, stories they will be able to retell along with you because of predictable elements such as rhyme, catch phrases, and repetition."***

of characters, time, and place), *theme* (an initiating event that causes the main character to react and form a goal or face a problem), *plot episodes* (events in which the main character attempts to attain the goal or solve the problem), and *resolution* (attainment of the goal or solution of the problem and the story ending):

1. Ask the child to retell the story by saying, "A little while ago I read the story, (name of story). Would you retell the story as if you were telling it to a friend who has never heard it before?" Young children might be provided with a doll or other prop to help them retell the story.
2. Use the following prompts only if and when they are necessary:

   If the child has difficulty beginning the story retelling, suggest beginning with "Once upon a time," or "Once there was..."

   If the child stops retelling before the end of the story, encourage continuation by asking, "What comes next?" or "Then what happened?"

   If the child stops retelling and cannot continue with the prompts offered in B, ask a question about the story that is relevant at the point which the child has paused. For example, "What was Jenny's problem in the story?"
3. When a child is unable to retell the story, or if the retelling lacks sequence and detail, prompt the retelling step by step. For example:

   "Once upon a time," or "Once there was..."

   "Who was the story about?"

   "When did the story happen?" (For instance, day, night, summer, winter?)

   "Where did the story happen?"

   "What was the main character's problem in the story?"

   "How did he (or she) try to solve the problem? What did he (or she) do first (second, next)?"

   "How was the problem solved?"

   "How did the story end?"

The child's ability to retell will determine how much guidance and scaffolding is required. In this situation, the term scaffolding refers to the adult's provision of all the responses in preparation for the youngsters' later responses. Scaffolding allows children to discover what is expected of them and to carry out the task at a later time (Applebee, 1980). Scaffolding offers the child as much help as needed, even if the teacher must retell the whole story in early guidance sessions. A teacher may decide to give more or less help depending on what he or she feels is most beneficial to the child. As children begin to discover how to handle the retelling task themselves, the adult scaffolding should diminish (see Cairney, this volume, for an extended discussion of scaffolding).

Figure 1 depicts the interactive behavior between a teacher and kindergarten child in a first story retelling:

As mentioned earlier, story retelling is not an easy task for young children; books selected should have good plot structures that make their story lines easy to follow and easy to retell. Other elements can add to a story's predictability and thus aid initial experiences in retelling it, particularly repetitive phrases, familiar sequences (use of days of the week, numbers, or letters), conversation, and general familiarity or popularity of a given story. Figure 2 displays a short bibliography of predictable books to be used for the purpose of retelling:

ALTERNATIVE STRATEGIES FOR CHILDREN'S STORY RETELLING

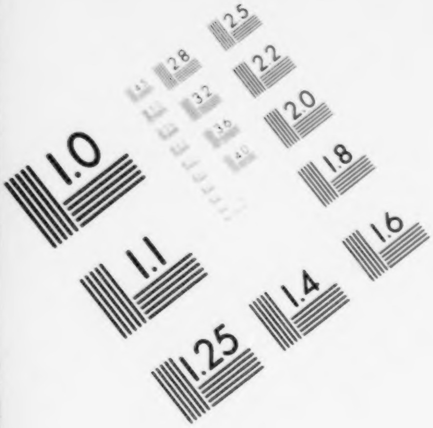
As stated earlier, retelling has not been a common practice in schools partly because it is time consuming and difficult for children. Nonetheless, there are many ways to make retelling a practical technique for classroom use. For practice and to gain skill, children can retell stories to others in their class and to younger children in the school. Children can retell into a tape recorder in order to listen to themselves or to be listened to by the teacher and other children. A story can be retold with or without the help of the book, although in the early childhood years, it is recommended that beginning attempts be prompted with pictures from books to provide guidance. Story props are also helpful to use with initial story retellings, especially with young children.

Retelling can take many forms. The following techniques make retelling enjoyable, whether used by the teacher or by students. They can be used alone, or by small groups of children. Retellings can be done alone, or for a large or small audience. After demonstrating these techniques yourself, encourage children to retell stories using props (Morrow, 1989, 1993).

Flannel characters on a flannel board is a good medium to encourage children to retell a story. Retell a story using a flannel board, then place the materials in the classroom library corner. Encourage your students to retell the story using the flannel board during a recreational reading period or a period designated for independent activities. Stories that lend themselves to the use of a flannel board are those with a limited number of characters that appear throughout the story, such as *Ask Mr. Bear* (Flack, 1932) or *Caps for Sale* (Slobodkina, 1947).

Figure 1
Interactive behavior between a teacher and a kindergarten child during a first retelling.

Teacher:	Philip, can you tell me the title of the story I just read to you today?	
Philip:	I don't know.	
Teacher:	Let's look at the cover of the book and see if that helps you remember. It was about a turtle. Can you remember his name?	[*Teacher prompts for title*]
Philip:	Oh yeah. *Franklin in the Dark*.	
Teacher:	That was very good Philip. You remembered the whole title of the story without my help. Now can you retell the story as you were going to tell it to your good friend Patrick. Now Patrick hasn't ever heard this story so you don't want to leave anything out when you tell it to him. Why don't you try and start to tell the story.	[*Teacher encourages student to continue*]
Philip:	Okay. *Franklin in the Dark*. One time Franklin didn't want to go in his shell. He was too scared. But his Mama said, there's nothin' in there. But Franklin didn't want to go in the shell because there was monsters in there. He didn't like to go in because he was afraid. At the end he went in 'cause his Mama got him a night light in his shell. So he turned on a light night light and went to sleep. And that's it.	
Teacher:	You did a fine job Philip. You remembered Franklin's problem, or the theme of the story, and how Franklin and his Mother solved the problem at the end of the story. Let's look at the book and see if there is anything else you could include in your retelling.	
Philip:	(the teacher and Philip start to look through the book). Oh yeah, I forgot stuff. Franklin went for a walk and he saw lots of animals who were scared of things. There was a lion who was afraid of loud noise, so he put on earmuffs.	
Teacher:	Were there any other animals?	[*Teacher prompts for other characters*]
Philip:	Yeah, well, there was this bird who was scared to fly high so he got a great big balloon thing to help him fly.	
Teacher:	The thing he used was called a parachute. Did he meet anyone else?	
Philip:	I don't know, I'm tired.	
Teacher:	Okay, I'll help you out. There was a polar bear who was afraid of the cold so he wore a snowsuit to keep him warm, and there was a duck who was afraid of deep water, and he used water wings when he went swimming.	
Philip:	Oh yeah, that's right.	
Teacher:	Philip you did really well today. When you have some time, why don't you take the book and look at the pictures and try to tell the story again.	



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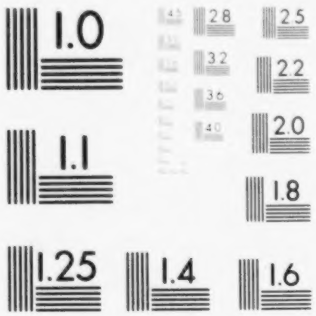

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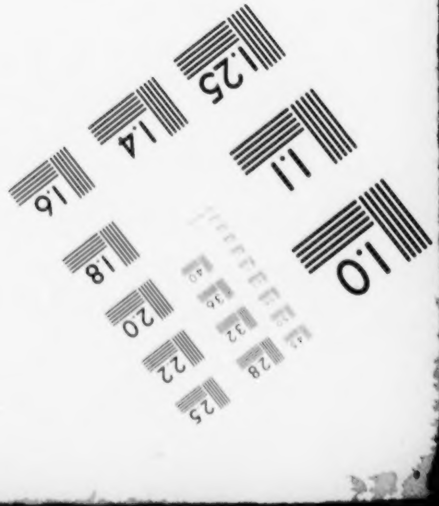

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Figure 2
Books with predictable structures.

Books with repetitive phrases

Eastman, P.D. (1960). *Are You My Mother?* New York: Random House.
Martin, B. (1967). *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?* New York: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston.
Shaw, C.G. (1947). *It Looked Like Spilt Milk.* New York: Viking Press.

Books with familiar sequences

Baum, A., & Baum, J. (1962). *One Bright Monday Morning.* New York: Random House.
Carle, E. (1970). *The Very Hungry Caterpillar.* New York: Puffin.
Mack, S. (1974). *Ten Bears in My Bed.* New York: Pantheon.

Books with conversation

Arno, E. (1970). *The Gingerbread Man.* New York: Scholastic.
Flack, M. (1971). *Ask Mr. Bear.* New York: Macmillan.
Zolotow, C. (1962). *Mister Rabbit and the Lovely Present.* New York: Harper and Row.

Popular and familiar stories

Galdone, P. (1972). *Goldilocks and the Three Little Bears.* New York: Seabury.
Galdone, P. (1975). *The Little Red Hen.* New York: Scholastic.
Slobodkina, E. (1974). *Caps for Sale.* Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Stories with good plot structures

Keats, E.J. (1967). *Peter's Chair.* New York: Harper & Row.
Lionni, L. (1973). *Swimmy.* New York: Random House.
Potter, B. (1902). *The Tale of Peter Rabbit.* New York: Scholastic.

Chalk talks also encourage children to retell stories after listening to a teacher's demonstration of the technique. The storyteller draws the story while telling it. Chalk talks are most effective when done on a large chalkboard so that the story can be told in sequence and without interruption from beginning to end. The same technique can be carried out on mural paper hung across a wall, with the storyteller using crayons or felt tip markers instead of chalk, or with an easel and chart paper. When you draw a story, choose one with simple illustrations and one in which only a few select pictures need to be drawn. You do not have to be an artist to utilize the technique; the artwork is secondary to the story retelling. Stories have been written as chalk talks; an entire series is *Harold and the Purple Crayon* (Johnson, 1955). Children are eager to try chalk talks after seeing this type of retelling modeled.

Stories can be retold with such props as stuffed animals, toys, and other articles that represent the characters and objects in a story. The props are shown at appropriate points during the storytelling. Three stuffed bears and a yellow-haired doll, three bowls, and three chairs can be used to retell *Goldilocks and the Three Bears* (Galdone, 1972). A large red balloon inflated with helium will be a fine prop for the story *The Red Balloon* (Lamorisse, 1956).

The use of puppets also encourages children to retell stories. A variety of types should be on hand for them to use: hand puppets, stick puppets, and finger puppets, to name just a few. Shy children tend to feel more secure retelling stories with puppets since they can believe more readily that the puppet is the storyteller, rather than themselves. Stories with dialogue and a limited number of characters are best suited for retelling with puppets, *The Three Little Pigs* (Galdone, 1970), for instance, or *The Three Billy Goats Gruff* (Brown, 1957).

Sound stories are another technique to encourage retelling, again modeled by teachers for the students' benefit. In this retelling technique, the audience and the storyteller provide sound effects when they are required to enhance a story's plot. The sounds can be made with voices, rhythm instruments, or music. In preparing to retell such a story, first select the parts of the story where sound effects are appropriate. Next, decide on the sound that will be made and who will make it. During the retelling, the students contribute the particular sounds they have been assigned. Record the presentation and leave the tape in a library corner with the book. Children can retell the story that has been told by the teacher using the sound effects created by the class. Some books that are good for retelling with sounds are *Noisy Book* (Brown, 1939), *Too Much Noise* (McGovern, 1967), and *Mr. Brown Can Moo. Can You?* (Seuss, 1970).

The production of dramatic retellings and taped versions enables students to produce semiotic texts as variants of the original texts (see Hartman & Allison, this volume, for discussion of semiotic texts). These techniques are effective in getting young children to retell stories. The props are helpful in aiding the retelling. The techniques allow for independent retelling, and consequently do not infringe on whole-class time. Because they provide entertaining presentations, they encourage a child's retelling with or to a friend in the classroom and suggest the opportunity of retelling stories to other groups of children in other classrooms. When children retell together with the use of props such as the ones suggested here, often one student does the telling and the other manipulates the materials. They will sometimes switch roles or take turns throughout a given retelling. As they retell together, they offer prompts to their peers if needed, such as offering information about what comes next. Children will correct their retelling partners if they make mistakes in the storyline. The following is a retelling by two first graders done with a flannel board. Patrick retells the story, while Charlene puts the characters on the board. Charlene offers prompts, corrects, and fills in parts left out by Patrick.

Patrick: There was these three billy goats, a big one, a little one and ummm

Charlene: It's the medium one you forgot.

Patrick: The goats had no grass on their side of the water, so the little one goes over the bridge to get some grass. The troll says,"I'm going to eat you up."

Charlene: No the troll says, "Who's that trip trappin' over my bridge," and the little goat says, "It is me the little one," and then the troll says, "I'm goin' to eat you up."

Patrick: The little one says, "I'm too little, my middle brother's comin'," and the troll said, "Then be off with you." The middle goat comes and the troll say, "Who's that trip trappin' on my bridge." "It is me the middle one." "I'm goin' to eat you up." The middle one says, "I'm too small, here comes my big brother." Charlene, put up the big goat.

Charlene: O.K. I'm gonna tell some now. The big goat came, and the troll said, "Who's that trip trappin' over my bridge." "It is me, the big goat." said the big one. "Come on, come over," said the troll.

Patrick: I'm finishing. Now he knocks him in the water.

Charlene: No not yet. The troll says, "I'm gonna knock your eyeballs into your ears."

Patrick: And that's what the goat done. He knocks the troll in the water. That's the end.

Charlene: No it's not Patrick. You have to say, and the Billy goats lived happily ever after, and now it's the end.

Book language is different from oral language. As children become accustomed to book language, they become better able to comprehend the book language of other books when they read them for the first time. They also increase their vocabularies and enhance the syntactic complexity of their own oral language by modeling the structures used by the authors. When children retell stories, they tend to use book language such as:

> "One bad day a tuna fish, swift, fierce and very hungry, came darting through the waves." (from Lionni's *Swimmy*, 1973), and
> "The wild things roared their terrible roars and gnashed their terrible teeth and rolled their terrible eyes..." (from Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are*, 1963)

Often during their retellings, children use the repeated catch phrases presented in books such as Piper's *The Little Engine that Could* (1954) ("I think I can, I think I can, I think

I can, I think I can..."), or in Dr. Seuss's *Horton Hatches the Egg* (1940) ("I meant what I said... and I said what I meant. An elephant's faithful...one hundred percent!") The young child who is not reading yet will often ask a teacher to "show me those words in the book. I want to see where it says that." Such responses represent the child's growing need and desire to learn to read.

> ***"Retelling demonstrates the ability to comprehend literally."***

After using the materials provided in the room for retelling, children should be encouraged to create their own felt stories, prop stories, chalk talks, and puppet stories to tell. To develop a storytelling technique for use with an audience, children enhance and demonstrate competence in basic comprehension skills. They learn to recognize and make use of the theme, sequence, basic facts, and organization of a story and to blend them into the technique. Thus, retelling demonstrates the ability to comprehend literally. They must be able to set mood for the audience, to anticipate outcomes in the oral presentation, to imply through expression how the characters feel, and to determine how the audience feels about the presentation. These requisites demonstrate the child's ability to comprehend interpretively. In addition, the child must select a piece of literature, judge its worth and appeal based on its theme, compare types of storytelling methods, and decide the best technique to tell the story. These decisions demonstrate critical thinking.

After guidance and practice with retellings, children can also be asked to rewrite stories. During writing it is difficult to offer the same type of guidance as done during oral retellings, therefore, rewritings should occur after children have had some experiences with retelling. Rewritings offer the same benefits of enhancing the interpretation of text and give practice through a different communication modality.

USING RETELLING AS AN ASSESSMENT TOOL

Story retellings and asking children to rewrite stories, can be used to measure a child's comprehension of a story, both the product and the process of comprehension (Morrow et al., 1986). Through analysis of a retelling or a rewriting, the teacher can diagnose a child's ability for literal recall (remembering facts, details, cause and effect relationships, and sequencing of events). Retellings can reveal a child's sense of story structure. For example, does a child's transcribed retelling include statements of setting, theme, plot episodes, and resolution? Through retelling, children also reveal their ability to make inferences as they organize, integrate, and classify information that is implied but not expressed in the story. They may generalize, interpret feelings, or relate ideas to their own experiences (Irwin & Mitchell, 1983; McConaughy, 1980). Holistic comprehension as revealed through a child's retelling seems to have an advantage over the more traditional piecemeal means of assessing comprehension by asking specific questions of the children (Morrow et al., 1986).

A child's story retellings and rewriting can be assessed several times during a school year to evaluate change. If you are going to evaluate a child's retelling, let the child know before you read the story that you will be asking him or her to retell or rewrite. During the retelling for evaluation, do not offer prompts as suggested earlier to guide and elicit retellings. You may, however, encourage children to offer their best by saying when they pause, "Can you think of anything else about the story?" or "You are doing very well. Can you try to continue?"

Evaluation of young children's retellings and rewritings often focuses on some of the more literal elements of comprehension such as inclusion of structural elements and awareness of facts, details, and sequences. Review of retelling transcripts and written retellings can also reveal interpretive and critical thinking if, for example, the child demonstrates a grasp of the underlying theme in the story.

To assess a child's oral or written retelling for its sense of story structure or inclusion of structural elements, the examiner should first parse or divide the events of the story into four categories: setting, theme, plot episodes, and resolution. The examiner then notes the number of ideas and events that the child accurately includes within each of the four structural categories, regardless of their order. A story guidesheet, outlining the parsed text, is used to help tabulate the ideas and events the child includes in the retelling. The child receives credit for a partial recall or for recounting the gist of a story event (Pellegrini & Galda, 1982; Thorndyke, 1977). Having checked off the child's inclusion of elements, the examiner observes sequence by comparing or contrasting the order of events in the child's retelling. The analysis indicates not only which elements a child includes or omits and how well a child sequences, but also where instruction might be necessary to develop an area in which the child's retelling has been particularly weak. A comparison of several oral and written retellings over a year will reveal the child's progress.

The following outline presents the events or parsed story for *Jenny Learns a Lesson* (Fujikawa, 1980), a story about a little girl who likes to play games of pretend and invites her friends to join her. When her friends come to play, Jenny becomes very aggressive and tells everyone what to do. After several such episodes, her friends leave angrily because of Jenny's bossing and do not return. Jenny becomes lonesome and realizes her problem. So, she apologizes to her friends, invites them back to play and promises not to boss them. They agree to play and this time all pretend as they wish. The parsed story in Figure 3 is followed here with the transcription of a five-year-old child's oral retelling of the story (see Figure 4), then an analysis of the retelling (see Figure 5). This same type of analysis can be used with a written retelling of a story.

Children should play an integral part in evaluating their oral and written retellings (see Walker, this volume, for an extended discussion of self-assessment discussions among

Figure 3
Parsed story: Jenny learns a lesson.

Setting

a. Once upon a time there was a girl who liked to play pretend.
b. Characters: Jenny (main character), Nicholas, Sam, Mei Su, Shags the dog.

Theme

Every time Jenny played with her friends, she bossed them and insisted that they do what she wanted them to.

Plot episodes

First episode: Jenny decided to pretend to be a queen. She called her friends and they came to play. Jenny told them all what to do and was bossy. The friends became angry and left.

Second episode: Jenny decided to play dancer, with the same results as in the first episode. (She calls her friends to play. She tells them what to do. The friends leave.)

Third episode: Jenny decided to play pirate, again with the same results.

Fourth episode: Jenny decided to play she was a duchess, again with the same results.

Fifth episode: Jenny's friends decided not to play with her again because she was so bossy. Many days passed and Jenny was punished for being bossy.

Resolution

a. The friends all played together and each person did what he or she wanted to do.
b. They all had a wonderful day and were so tired that they fell asleep.

Figure 4
Sample verbatim transcription.

Beth, Age 7

Once upon a time there's a girl named Jenny and she called her friends over and they played queen and went to the palace. They had to, they had to do what she said and they didn't like it, so then they went home and said that was boring…It's not fun playing queen and doing what she says you have to. So they didn't play with her for seven days and she had…she had a idea that she was being selfish, so she went to find her friends and said, I'm sorry I was so mean. And said, let's play pirate, and they played pirate and they went onto the pretend boat. Then they played that she was a fancy lady playing house. And then they have some tea. And they played what they wanted and they were happy…. The End.

Figure 5
Story retelling analysis for sense of story structure.

Child's Name Beth Age 7

Title of Story Jenny Learns a Lesson Date ____________

General directions: Credit "gist" as well as obvious recall, counting boy, girl, or dog, for instance, as well as *Nicholas*, *Mei Su*, or *Shags*. Credit plurals (*friends*, for instance) as two.

Setting	
a. Begins story with an introduction	1
b. Names main character	1
c. Number of other characters named	2
d. Actual number of other characters	4
e. Score for "other characters" (c/d):	0.5
f. Includes statement about time or place	1
Theme	1
Refers to main character's primary goal or problem to be solved.	
Plot episodes	
a. Number of episodes recalled	4
b. Number of episodes in story	5
c. Score for "plot episodes" (a/b)	0.8
Resolution	
a. Names problem solution/goal attainment	1
b. Ends story	1
Sequence	1
Retells story in structural order: setting, theme, plot episodes, resolution. (Score 2 for proper, 1 for partial, 0 for no sequence evident.	

Highest score possible: 10 Child's score 8.3

* Checks can be used instead of numbers to get a general sense of elements children include and progress over time. A quantitative analysis as shown above is optional. Retellings can be evaluated for interpretive and critical comments.

(Morrow, 1993)

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children). Just as a teacher evaluates a child's retelling, so can a child do the same with his or her own form, either alone or in a conference setting. The following illustrates a portion of a discussion used in an assessment for the oral retelling:

Teacher: Beth, let's read the transcription of your retelling together.

(They both began to read. The teacher let Beth read alone as long as she seemed comfortable).

Teacher: Now let's review the retelling and look at the storybook to see how much you remembered.

(The teacher gave Beth the book and an evaluation form (see Figure 6 below) to evaluate her work.

Figure 6
Student oral or written retelling evaluation form.

Name______________________ Date__________

Name of story______________________________

	yes	no
Setting		
a. I began the story with an introduction	_____	_____
b. I talked about the main character	_____	_____
c. I talked about other characters	_____	_____
d. I told when the story happened	_____	_____
e. I told where the story happened	_____	_____
Theme		
I told about the problem in the story or the main goal of the characters.	_____	_____
Plot episodes		
I included episodes in the story	_____	_____
Resolution		
a. I told how the problem was solved or goal achieved	_____	_____
b. I had an ending on the story	_____	_____
Sequence		
My story was retold or rewritten in proper order	_____	_____

Comments for improvement:

Next time I need to include in my retelling:

After evaluating the retelling, the following discussion occurred.

Beth: I have an introduction, "Once upon a time there was a girl named Jenny."

Teacher: Good Beth, and you also talked about and named the main character and told about her. Can you find that in your retelling?

Beth: (Searching) Yup, here it is.

The teacher and student move through the retelling and use the student assessment form as they find the elements included. They also note what is missing and comment on what to be careful about, including the retelling of the next story.

When analyzing what children in kindergarten through third grade remember in their retellings, I found that humorous details or unusual types of events were included frequently. Children remembered details that they could relate to their own experiences. In these instances they would project their own feelings about the experience into the retelling. Parts of stories that were illustrated in the book were retold often. Retellings revealed that children were able to infer how characters felt when this information was not specifically stated in the story. Children substituted language they knew rather than what was stated in a story, demonstrating that they understood the text, but that certain words were not a part of their oral vocabulary at the time. For example, in the story *Cromwell's Glasses*, the text states, "Cromwell's mother took him to the optometrist to get a check-up." In a retelling, a first grade child said, "Cromwell's Mommy took him to the eye doctor." Children remember the theme of the story, the main character's problem or goal, as well as the resolution of the narrative, more often than they remember the episodes that lead to helping the main character accomplish a goal. They remember main ideas more than little details.

This information helps us with appropriate expectations for children's retellings. It gives us the information about what we need to help children enrich their understanding. In addition, it suggests that elements such as humor, illustrations, unusual events, and experiences they can relate to their own lives are important elements in books we select for children to retell in initial experiences with the task.

Practice, guidance, and evaluation of stories retold and rewritten, have been found to improve children's written and oral original stories. The teacher refers to the elements learned when retelling and rewriting stories and to the self-evaluation sheets to demonstrate the characteristics that comprise a good story. When children create original written and oral stories, the following evaluation form can be used by the teacher and child (see Figure 7).

Figure 7
Evaluating oral and written original stories.

Name__________________________ Date__________

Name of story______________________________________

	yes	no
Setting		
a. The story begins with an introduction	____	____
b. One or more main characters emerge	____	____
c. Other characters are talked about	____	____
d. The time of the story is mentioned	____	____
e. Where the story takes place is mentioned	____	____
Theme		
a. A beginning event occurs that causes a problem	____	____
for the main character or goal to be achieved	____	____
b. The main character reacts to the problem	____	____
Plot episodes		
a. An event or series of events are mentioned that relate to the main character solving the problem or attaining the goal.	____	____
Resolution		
a. The main character solves the problem or achieves the goal	____	____
b. The story ends with a closing statement	____	____
Sequence		
The four categories of story structure are presented in typical	____	____
sequential order (setting, theme, plot episodes, resolution).	____	____

CONCLUSION

Retelling helps us understand the comprehension processes used by a reader or listener. Retelling is a generative task that requires the reteller to construct a personal text, making inferences based on original text as well as on prior knowledge. Research has demonstrated that instruction and practice in retelling are likely to result in the development of comprehension, a sense of story structure, and oral complexity in a child's use of language.

Retelling is also a valuable assessment tool. It can be used to assess a child's sense of story structure, comprehension, oral language complexity, and reproduction and production of stories and text. Analysis of retelling can help a teacher identify problems not obvious when a student is asked simply to answer questions.

Young children should receive instruction and guidance in retelling and should be provided with time to practice the technique in school. The appropriate type of interactive discussion reviewed in this chapter should occur between teacher and child. Children should also have the opportunity to retell with one another since they also offer guidance and support. A variety of formats for retelling should be provided.

Because retelling has the potential to improve and develop the same skills it can assess, it should be used for both purposes. Both as an instructional strategy and as an assessment tool, retelling helps move teachers away from the view that reading is a set of isolated skills to a view of reading as a process for conveying and recreating meaning. Story retelling provides a forum for interactive discussion and the interpretation of and comprehension of text.

AUTHOR NOTE

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CHAPTER 18

Discussions That Focus on Strategies and Self-Assessment

Barbara J. Walker

Classroom learning can be dramatically different when the teacher lets the students talk with one another. As Booth (1991) points out, "As we engage in talk, we literally tell the stories of our lives as we live them, constructing the realities of our beings in conversation" (p. 90). Children spontaneously experience the world and develop private images until the time that they want to tell someone. This desire to talk with others engages students in conversations, and they tell their stories as they construct their conceptualizations. Thus, language and literacy emanate from the need to socially interact (Vygotsky, 1978) where individuals can "talk themselves into understanding" (Booth, 1991, p. 91). This thinking out loud is how individuals elaborate their spontaneous concepts and strategies.

In school, these spontaneous concepts and processes are woven with academic understanding. This process is complex and seldom occurs in a single year. Rather, students construct this tapestry of concepts and processes over time. In fact, as students interweave both spontaneous and academic knowledge, they discuss their developing understanding with their friends. Students verbalize their experiences and new information during social interactions where they can try various ideas and strategies with more knowledgeable students or teachers. Therefore, one of the many roles the teacher assumes is to assist not only the development of new concepts but the interweaving of spontaneous and academic knowledge and strategies by guiding the talk in the classroom. When teachers focus on discussions, they are looking at how the social interactions in their classrooms influence thinking and learning.

As noted by Almasi (this volume), teachers encourage talk by creating classroom discussions that focus on constructing ideas rather than giving right or wrong answers. However, many instructional interactions do not focus on an exchange of ideas about the content read and the strategies used to construct meaning with texts. Much of the time teachers ask questions to assess learning rather than discuss learning (Durkin, 1978–1979). By focusing on irrelevant information without connecting it to the reader's knowledge, the teacher inhibits literacy development and reinforces a context of interrogation rather than dialogue. This recitation format does not allow students to participate in responsive discussions where they can construct meaning.

In responsive discussions, the participants share in jointly constructing meaning and discussing their thinking. Thus, meaning is negotiated during the discussion as each individual strategically reconstructs his or her ideas. The teacher listens closely, focusing comments on the students' thinking (McGee, this volume; Peterson & Eeds, 1990) and encouraging reflection by saying "Let's think more about that." Thus, meaning is coconstructed among group members and shared understanding is created by framing and reconsidering themes and concepts. In these interactions, meaning is not always explicit to either the students or the teacher. Students' statements are gradually negotiated through the interaction process as the ongoing discussion highlights relevant information moment by moment. Only by looking backwards when the discussion is over can meaning be understood. In discussion, meaning is coconstructed by making connections between the text and personal interpretations. Teachers support meaning construction by listening closely to students' ideas and responding to and interjecting comments that interweave the students' present understanding with the lesson focus. They predict the students' intended meaning and tailor the conversation to meet the developing understanding of the students (McGee, this volume; Tharp & Gallimore, 1989). Classroom discussions are therefore much more than interrogations. They are ways students and teachers seek to give confirmation and support (Tannen, 1990). They develop common ground for thinking and a sense of community in our classrooms.

> ***"Teachers support meaning construction by listening closely to students' ideas and responding to and interjecting comments that interweave the students' present understanding with the lesson focus."***

CLASSROOM DISCUSSIONS

Classroom conversations bring together two important aspects of discussion: conversation and instruction (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988). In classroom discussions, the teacher assumes "that the learner may have something to say beyond the 'answers' already known by the teacher." (Gallimore & Tharp,

> "The teacher assumes the role of the mentor probing the students about how they are thinking rather than what they are thinking."

1992, p. 197). Their probes are constructed to find out more about the students' ideas and strategies. Students are challenged to construct their own ways of thinking and to interweave their spontaneous knowledge with developing academic knowledge. In classroom discussions, teachers welcome diverse strategies. All students, including at-risk learners, are invited to discuss their thinking. Their perspectives and strategies are valued as a means to widen options rather than focus on right answers. The teacher does teach, but this teaching is not direct; it takes the form of sensitive conversations with and among students.

This approach combines two distinct ways to engage in discussion. The conversational aspects deal with the supportive elements of the discussion and the instructional aspects deal with promoting the lesson focus (Goldenberg, 1992–1993). Look first at the conversational aspects of the discussion where the teacher maintains a responsive dialogue with the students. Figure 1 describes five elements that teachers can use to direct their conversations. The instructional aspect of the discussion is crafted to enhance learning and thinking (see Figure 2). It also includes five elements adapted from Goldenberg's work (1992–1993).

Together these ten elements provide a framework for designing classroom discussions. Although there are many types of classroom discussions, this chapter will focus on two kinds: discussions that cultivate reading strategies and discussions that promote self-assessment. In each of these types of discussions, the teacher assumes the role of the mentor probing the students about *how* they are thinking rather than *what* they are thinking. The focus is on the process of learning and, thus, both the teacher and the students are engaged in a purposeful dialogue where the teacher can lead the students to

Figure 1
Elements for use in directing conversations.

---

1. Open-ended comments where the teacher guides rather than interrogates
2. Kid-listening to sensitively respond to students' comments
3. Overlapping where each individual's contribution is connected and builds toward a cohesive understanding
4. Collaborative, yet challenging discussions where students are free to experiment with their ideas
5. Extensive engagement by all participants

Figure 2
Elements for directing the instructional aspect of a discussion.

1. A shared activity where the teacher maintains a focus on the overall lesson goal
2. Naming what students know and do by explaining spontaneous comments in terms of the goal
3. Modeling thinking by using "I" statements
4. Encouraging elaborations and reflective thinking by phasing in and out of the discussion using pauses, restatements, and probes like "tell me more..."
5. Promoting reasoning by encouraging students to explain and defend their understanding

interweave their spontaneous strategies with a more complex understanding of the learning process.

DISCUSSIONS THAT CULTIVATE READING STRATEGIES

During these discussions, the teacher listens carefully to how the students are constructing responses and discusses their strategies with them (Walker, 1995). They phase in and out of the discussion to create an atmosphere that promotes thinking rather than recitation. When readers are continually bombarded with the recitation format, they become passive and fail to construct meaning. These instructional interactions are even more dramatic for at-risk readers who have mostly encountered extended instructional interactions focusing on isolated skills rather than strategically reading text.

The infrequent use of strategies produces a chaotic process for reading. In fact, at-risk readers remain "unconvinced of the importance or necessity of using strategies" even when these are demonstrated (Paris & Oka, 1989, p. 34). By *phasing in* to demonstrate and name strategies and *phasing out* to let students use new strategies independently, teachers encourage students to develop their own thinking rather than simply repeating what the teacher said or what they read in the textbook. The teachers' questions and suggestions are designed to learn more about the students' thinking and to offer additional strategies for constructing meaning. They listen carefully so that they can restate the students' perspective and make connections valuing the students' strategic processes. Thus, teaching includes discussions that focus on reading strategies and how to orchestrate these while reading.

When teachers phase in, they explain the active reading process by demonstrating how they think through their understanding, and they model the inner dialogue that occurs when reading. These conversations are dominated by *"I" statements* where they talk about their personal strategy use and think aloud about how they analyzed a particular response. "Showing the how and modeling 'I think...' releases students from the necessity of having to do the process in the same way. 'I do it this way' implies that others can do it a different way..." (Walker, 1996, p. 52). Using "I" statements engages all students in thinking about how they might perform the same task.

A simple way to begin is to demonstrate making a prediction. A teacher may say, "When I begin reading, I think about the title, and think about what I already know...Let's see, this title is *The River* (Paulsen, 1991)?, I bet this is about Brian going down a river because I read *Hatchet* (1986) by Paulsen and Brian was the main character in that book. This says its a sequel to *Hatchet*. What do you bet it is about...?" This demonstration models a prediction and then asks students to discuss their predictions. It presents discussions as a shared activity where each participant contributes to meaning construction. In more sophisticated demonstrations, teachers actually think aloud as they read in order to communicate their strategy use. For instance, one teacher recounted reading the following passage from *The River* (italics indicates the self-talk):

> The bluffs forced the river to a narrower width,...making a monstrous chute where the water fought and roared to get through, smashing around the rocks in huge sprays of white water. *(Oh, this reminds me of the rapids of reading development—the difficulty all the students face when they don't understand. It is like going through the rapids.)*
>
> The raft seemed to come alive, turn into a wild, crazy animal...Brian tried to steer, using the paddle *(ahhha like the teacher trying to steer thinking)* to swing the stern to the left and right, trying to avoid the boulders, but it was no use.
>
> The water owned the raft, owned Derek, owned him. In the roaring, piling thunder of the river he had no control *(exactly, like many readers who struggle).*

After this demonstration, the teacher talked aloud: "I am always connecting unusual experiences that help me remember and visualize what I am reading. Sometimes, however, I put too much of what I know into the text. I have to continually monitor myself to see if I am on the right track. This time I made connections of Brian's struggle in the river with the reader's struggle to learn strategies. After this interlude of making these unusual connections, I was back on track..." (Walker, 1996, p. 126).

This demonstration did more than simply show the reader about strategy use, it actually created a shared experience that both the teacher and the students could use to discuss spontaneous strategy use as well as an academic understanding of using more complex strategies during literacy interactions. As teachers talk about their own meaning construction, they help students develop a realistic understanding of their

"*As teachers talk about their own meaning construction, they help students develop a realistic understanding of their strategy use.*"

strategy use. When teachers view their own reading process in a lighthearted manner, they create a collaborative atmosphere that encourages open experimentation.

By creating a shared activity, teachers collaborate with readers as they experiment with novel ideas and strategies. In group settings, teachers can participate in discussion and provide comments that overlap with the ideas students express. Using webs as a flexible discussion tool, teachers record the students' ideas and help them take on the role of kid-listener. The web looks more like a wagon wheel with students' ideas written on spokes around the main concept. Webbing has been a powerful discussion tool for Native American students who often prefer to focus their attention on this visual representation. For them, an empty circle on the spoke of the web needs to be filled; therefore, they begin to interact in an academic setting. Likewise, less verbal students use the web to help them follow the discussion, enabling them to verbalize their ideas. This visual record refocuses the discussion so that students can revisit their thinking and readily describe their strategy use.

During these discussions, the teacher listens carefully to how the students are constructing responses and, when appropriate, discusses or names their strategies. For instance, the teacher might name the strategy by saying: "I noticed how you used your knowledge about canoeing to change your prediction about what Brian might do—that was using what you know to revise your thinking." At other times, the teacher can encourage elaborations by asking questions like:

> I wonder how the ideas fit together?
>
> Does that fit with what your were just saying?
>
> Can you support that with an example from the story?
>
> Have you had previous experiences that are influencing your thinking?

(See Hartman & Allison, this volume, for an expanded discussion of how to foster such extratextual connections). These prompts help students talk about the strategies they are using and develop flexible use of more complex strategies within the context of an authentic literacy experience.

The teachers circulate among groups, encouraging students to brainstorm their ideas and justifications in order to expand their thinking. They help students understand their spontaneous strategy use and weave it with more complex strategy use by engaging them in discussions.

DISCUSSIONS THAT PROMOTE SELF-ASSESSMENT

During discussions that promote self-assessment, students evaluate their literacy development by sharing their literacy histories. The teacher and students engage in collaborative discussions to establish literacy goals. When only the teacher establishes goals for literacy, students are often unaware of their strategies or how they construct meaning. In fact, at-risk readers often develop a confused notion of their strategy use and its relationship to their understanding. When they do understand text, they have no idea what strategies they employed. Instead, they believe that someone else (a teacher or a friend) or something else (an easy text) was responsible. They do not attribute their understanding to themselves. Once students are personally engaged in conversations about goals, they begin to talk about their spontaneous strategies. Letting students collaborate in the assessment process gives them the opportunity to talk about their literacy. As the students engage in self-assessment, they begin to describe and control their personal literacy development.

When teachers create self-assessments, students discuss and evaluate how their literacy and their strategies are progressing (Walker, 1995). For instance, Gerry's teacher was emphasizing the monitoring process (a shared activity) during a term. To begin the discussion about monitoring, Gerry's teacher introduced the monitoring checksheet (see Figure 3 below). This monitoring checksheet served as a discussion tool to talk about per-

Figure 3
Monitoring checksheet.

	Names of stories				
Checked my understanding by relating what I was reading to what I knew.					
Pictured the story in my mind.					
Summarized what I understood.					
Asked myself questions.					
Changed my mind when needed.					

Summary of my strategy use for stories ______________________________

____

____

____

sonal strategy use. Then, Gerry's teacher introduced the prediction checksheet. This prediction checksheet also served as a conversational tool to discuss personal strategy use.

After reading a story, the students would evaluate their strategy use. One of Gerry's classmates, an at-risk reader, marked no responses on his checksheet. However, in discussing how he thought he read, he described his reading of the story as "great." The teacher probed his response further asking him to elaborate his reading strategies. He replied, "My reading was great this time because I paid attention the whole time. Most of the time my mind wanders." This interaction helped the teacher and the student redefine the student's goals for reading.

Gerry's teacher and the students discussed not only their interpretation and strategy use, but also how reading strategies had changed. This discussion about changes opened the conversation to discuss complexity in reading. After reading a story in a small group, Gerry wrote on her monitoring checksheet:

> When I read, I use my imagination but not to help me check my understanding. Although I have been working on using my summaries and my imagination to check my understanding, this time I was imagining what it would be like to be in the rapids like Meryl Streep in the movie *The River Wild*.

This reflection described how she was reading and how the monitoring checksheet helped her talk about the strategies she was using. She also began to talk about more than one factor influencing the implementation of her reading strategies. With a partner, Gerry reviewed several monitoring sheets and talked about how her use of comprehension monitoring had changed. Her friends responded with examples from their own reading. Both in individual conversations and in small group discussions, Gerry had elaborated her strategy use to reveal her spontaneous and academic use of literacy processes.

Gerry's teacher took the assessment process one step further by suggesting that students could select samples of their work to include in their portfolio that described their strategies as well as what they had learned. Portfolios are powerful tools to promote discussion about self-assessment, particularly for poor readers. Even students who are poor readers are encouraged to select artifacts that demonstrate what they know and can do. In this way, portfolios open the discussion about strengths and strategy use helping poor readers define their successes instead of highlighting failures. These discussions extend the dialogue about how changes in literacy occur and help poor readers attribute their success to the strategies they are using (see Matanzo, this volume, for additional ideas concerning portfolio assessment).

As students and teachers discuss what to put in the portfolio, students revisit their work, discussing aspects of their learning. Rather than an individual activity, constructing a portfolio is a shared activity where teachers and students discuss literacy development. This rethinking of the learning process involves students in focused discussions about the tasks of reading and writing as well as their strategies. These discussions are the draft thinking behind the written reflection that is attached to each piece of work. Once the work is selected, a description of what it represents and why it is included is attached. This reflection answers the basic question: "Why was this piece selected and what does it show about literacy?" (Hansen, 1994).

Before this reflection can occur, students and teachers need to discuss reading and writing strategies and how each student is orchestrating those strategies. Probes can help teachers lead discussions as they work with portfolios. The teachers can ask the following: (a) Let's see, what have we been working on? (comprehension monitoring), (b) What would demonstrate your monitoring? and (c) What did you learn as you did this activity? These probes are just guidelines as teachers and students begin to collaborate to construct a portfolio. As the students describe their reading, the teacher names the strategies so that the students are more aware of their spontaneous use of strategies as well as the newly acquired use of more complex strategies.

Discussions that promote self-assessment help students evaluate their own engagement in literacy, allowing students to discuss their spontaneous strategies and how they are acquiring a more complex network of strategies. As teachers and students discuss progress, they choose items that demonstrate what they know and can do. Thus, as they discuss, students think about how their spontaneous strategies are woven with more complex strategy use.

CONCLUSIONS

In discussions that cultivate strategic processing and promote self-assessment, the interactions are often intimate and demand sensitivity from the teacher. Equally important are the activities in which the students and teachers are engaged. This chapter has proposed that strategy and self-assessment discussions are shared activities where participants can talk about their spontaneous strategies interweaving them with more complex strategy use. These classroom discussions have common characteristics.

- The discussions have a focus of either strategy use or self-assessment where both teachers and students can collaboratively discuss their literacy development. This shared purposeful activity keeps the conversation moving.
- The teacher becomes a *kid-listener*, tailoring responses to the students' comments and strategy use. There is a give-and-take in the discussion as the teacher phases in to support the students' thinking and strategy use and phases out to let the students independently discuss their thinking. This supports the students' elaborations and interweaving of spontaneous and academic strategy use.

- In response to the students' comments, the teacher names the strategies that the students spontaneously use and helps them describe these strategies. When appropriate, the teacher models strategy use and assessment by using "I" statements.
- The teacher encourages reflection and elaboration by suggesting that students rethink their understanding and their responses. In this way, the teacher refocuses the discussion by restating what the students were saying and asking them to revisit their thinking. Their response increases the probability of the students' interweaving of spontaneous and academic strategy use.
- Finally, the teacher works to include all students in classroom discussions through open-ended comments that promote individuality in thinking.

Creating classroom discussions that have a purpose is a sensitive activity but it is also a learning activity. Teachers share in these conversations not only because they care but because that is where learning occurs.

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Linda B. Gambrell

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